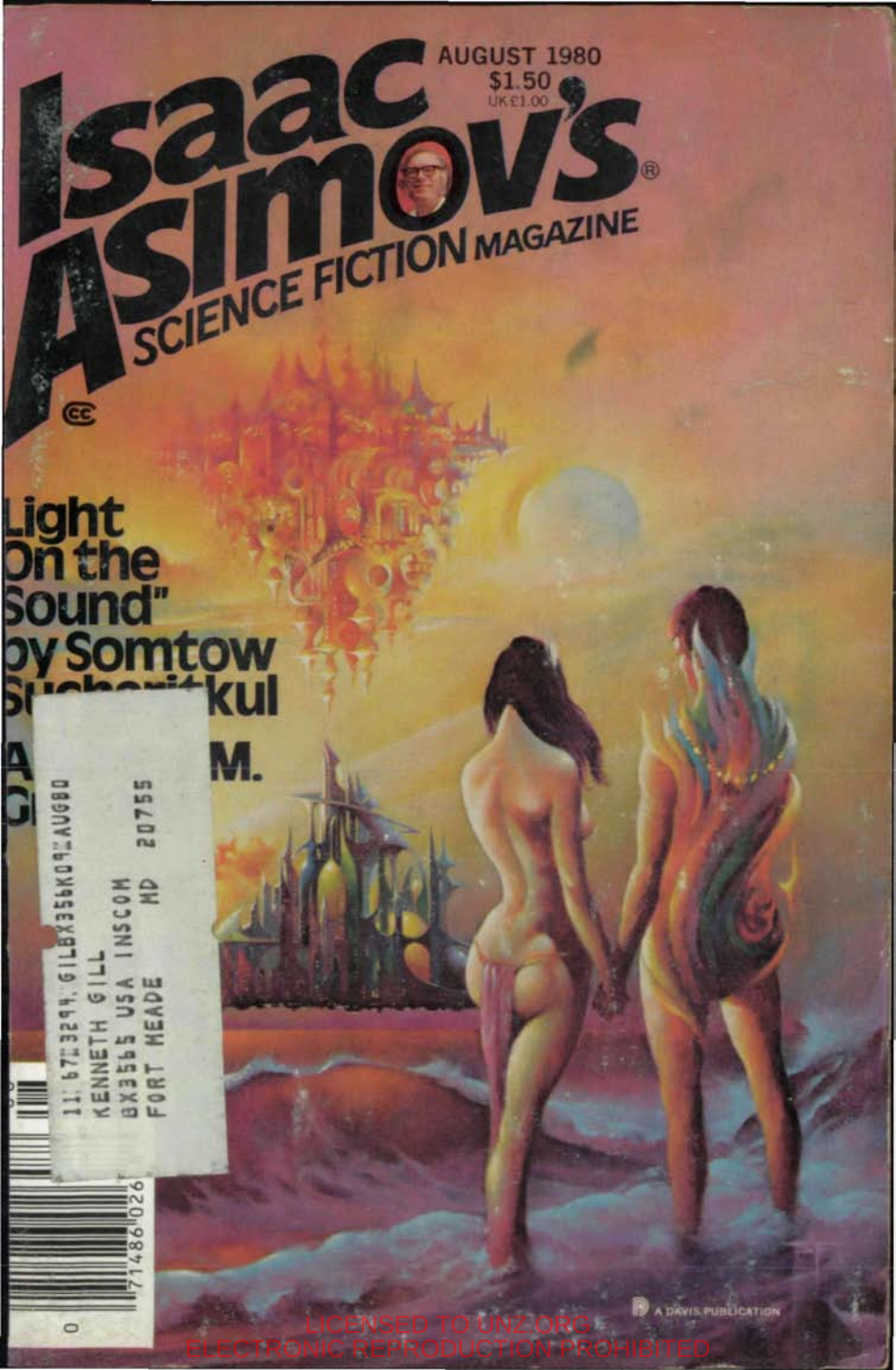

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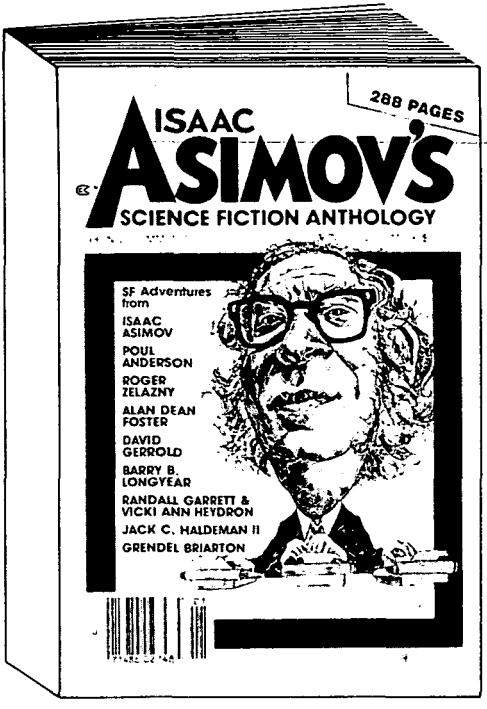

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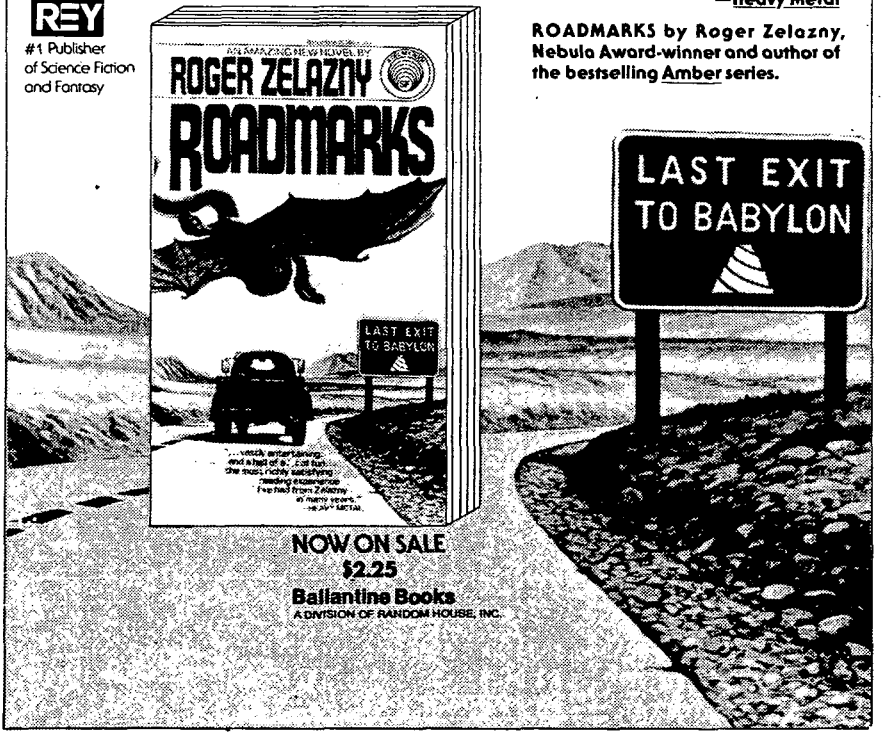

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EDITORIAL: DOUBLE DACTYLS REVISITED

by Isaac Asimov

art: Frank Kelly Freas

Wrong again! I thought that the double dactyls would be harder than the sonnets and that the submissions would drop off. Not so!

The entries simply poured in. The only relief was that double dactyls were shorter and much funnier than the sonnets, and easier to eliminate for a variety of reasons. Also, this time I had made it plain I wouldn't return any submissions, which saved me much time in scrawling comments and in licking envelopes.

The virtue of the whole thing, however, is that it is clearly demonstrated that there are a lot of clever people out there who are interested in challenges and odd things; and that is good for me and for the magazine and for the whole world.

But that doesn't make it easier to pick the winner. I ended picking two—one using a scientific theme and one using a science fiction theme. Nor will I split the first prize. Fifteen dollars will go out to each of the winners.

First the scientific one, by Jeanne Hopkins:

Higgledy piggledy
Albert A. Michelson
Did his experiment,
Came away miffed:
"Need a more accurate
Interferometer—
Back to the drawing board—
Can't get the drift."

Simply perfect in every way, right down to the final play on words! Both the proper name in the second line and the single word in the sixth line are delightful and they go together.

The science fiction winner is by Scott Ripple:

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Higgledy piggledy
Hellraiser Ellison
Writes with such fever, such
Fervor, such strength:
Twenty-nine pages of
Sesquipedalian
Intros for stories of
Twenty-page length.

In addition, F. Gwynplaine MacIntyre, who won the acrostic sonnet contest, sent in six double dactyls and said, gloomily, that he supposed I wouldn't let him win a second time. Well, it was close. All six were very good, and five were honorable-mention grade. His one-word double dactyls for those five were "phantasmagorical," "heterosexual," "microbiology," "Mesopotamian," and "veterinarian."

Poul Anderson sent in *nine* double dactyls, and I was a little nervous lest I be forced to give first prize to a dirty pro and cause pursed lips of disapproval among the fans. Three of his entries were definitely honorable-mention grade, and the one-word double dactyls involved there were "incomprehensible," "discontinuity," and "ultradesirable."

Putting all that aside, we are left quite a few additional honorable mentions. No money, alas, but think of all the glory of having your name mentioned in a grade-A magazine. I will list the honorable mentions by the name of the contributor and by the one-word double dactyl each came up with. They are in random order.

Name	*Double Dactyl*
Mary H. Perkins	Universality
Carol A. Donnelly	Unenterprisingly
Elizabeth A. Singleton	Nymphomaniacal
Nancy M. Athey	Anticlimactical
Dudley Cooney (Miss)	Heliocentricists
Thomas Henken	Psychoanalysis
Doris R. Goldberg	Extemporaneous
Rachel Cosgrove Payes	Supercollectable
Rose E. Hossner	Scientifictional
Natalia Mayer	Unreproducible
Marion H. Smith	Sesquicentennial
Ruth E. Packing	Memorabilia
Joe Marchesani	Incontrovertible

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Carl Holzman	Semidetectable
Gary M. Wilson	Extraterrestrial
Claire Mahan	Antepenultimate
Christine Watson	Indefatigable
Robert O. Waterman	Duplicability
Monica Gale Shostack	Circumlocutional

Please notice how heavily women are featured among the winners and honorable mentions. Both the number and quality of the double dactyls presented by women were high. From this, I deduce that women; *our* women, at least; that is, the ones who read the magazine; are particularly enterprising and particularly witty. (It is already known that they are particularly beautiful.) Doris R. Goldberg and Rose E. Hossner won honorable mentions in *both* contests.

Well, I can't let things go, I'm afraid. The responses have been so enthusiastic, and so many of those who have submitted either sonnets in the first contest or double dactyls in the second have asked for more, that I suppose we must try a third time. And I can no longer avoid the limerick.

I have to begin by assuming you know what a limerick is. In fact, one of the hurdles in this particular contest is that I won't go through all the details of defining it. The limerick is so familiar a verse form you should know what it is—and if you are uncertain about the exact details, then please find out for yourself, for I shall seize upon any imperfection to eliminate a submission.

The first condition is that the first line has to end with the name of a star or a constellation. Only the Latin names are permissible, so that you can use "Capricornus" but *not* "Goat"; and "Ursa Major" but *not* "Great Bear." The same goes for stars. You must use "Alpha Canis Majoris" but *not* "Sirius"; or "Omicron Ceti" but *not* "Mira." None of the other lines may end with such a name.

There are 88 different constellations, and each has a genitive form used in naming stars, and I will leave it to you to find lists of those constellations and their genitive forms. That's another hurdle.

The second condition is that the limerick must have either a scientific or a science fictional theme. As an example, consider one of my own, published in the Fall 1977 issue of this magazine.

Those Creatures from Alpha Centauri
Crave extra-terrestrial glory
By conquering Earth.
But what is that worth?
Earth wins by the end of the story.

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The third condition (I'm sorry) is that the limerick has to be decorous. By tradition, limericks are bawdy, lecherous, and ribald—and I approve of that—but not in this magazine, please.

How ribald is too ribald? Well, here is an example of a limerick I've just made up (which happens to be neither scientific nor science fictional in theme so that it wouldn't qualify if it were a submission) that is of maximum permissible ribaldry:

Young women born under Aquarius
Have talents delightful and various.
Their fetching appearance
Asks instant adherence.
Whatever results is hilarious.

Anything more ribald than that won't qualify for either winner or honorable mention, although I shall surely enjoy them privately.

Again, the prize-winner gets a personal check for $15.00; and the winning limerick will be published in the editorial column. Please keep carbons because I won't return any submissions, and please address all submissions to: Isaac Asimov, Limericks, Davis Publications, 380 Lexington Ave. NY NY 10017. That way George and Shawna can ignore them. The deadline is September 30, 1980.

Oh, and one more thing. *Please,* one to a customer! You may write all the limericks you wish, but then pick out the one you consider the best and send me only that one.

(And if you think comic verse is fun, you ought to attend the seminars I conduct at the Institute of Man and Science, in Rensselaerville, New York, each summer—August 3-7 this year.)

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ON BOOKS
by Baird Searles

The Number of the Beast by Robert A. Heinlein, Fawcett, $6.95 (paper).
The Grey Mane of Morning by Joy Chant, Bantam Books, $6.95 (paper).
Teaching Science Fiction: Education for Tomorrow edited by Jack Williamson, Owlswick Press, $15.00.
The Ghosts of the Heaviside Layer and Other Fantasms, by Lord Dunsany, Owlswick Press, $20.00.

All but the greenest of science fiction readers must know that Robert A. Heinlein is *the* science fiction writer, but I have a particular reason for stating the obvious here. If the Big 3—Asimov, Clarke, Heinlein—had to be reduced to one, that one would be Heinlein, despite the status and influence of the other two. What this extra edge is, is hard to pin down. It might be the aura of controversy that has surrounded him for some time, excited by his decided opinions that have caused him to be labelled a fascist and militarist (unfairly, if only because the labels are too easy).

There is also the factor that his was the first science fiction to be read by vast numbers of readers due to his series of genre books for young people, and some of these books are among the best SF ever written (*Citizen of the Galaxy* et ál.). The popularity of his writing for adults extends back to the beginning of his career as one of that incredible group of authors discovered by John W. Campbell for *Astounding* in the late 1930s. I fell under his spell a decade later; I have no real idea what the first Heinlein story I ever read was, but I was soon on the lookout for others.

I have reiterated these mostly all-too-well-known facts to establish just where I stand on the matter of Heinlein before going into the matter of his latest novel.

Its title is *The Number of the Beast*; and it is a major disappointment, as have been his last two books. What is bad about it is all too easy to say; I'll tackle that below. *Why* it is bad is beyond the purview of this column. However, it is interesting to note that the reigning geniuses of this century in the arts—Stravinsky, Picasso, Balanchine—contented themselves late in their careers with repeating themselves in endless variations, honed finer and finer, of

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their earlier creations. Is it because it is easier and safer? That if there are challenges left, there isn't the strength (and blindness) of youth to attempt them? Or is it some other thing not vouchsafed to us ordinary mortals?

I'm hardly comparing Heinlein to Stravinsky & Co.; nevertheless, his position in his chosen field of endeavor is analogous to theirs. Alas, they have elected to repeat what is best in their work; Heinlein, perversely, seems determined to recapitulate what is the worst in his.

Heinlein's plots, for instance, have never been exactly elaborate: they have a tendency to start at the beginning, go on through the middle and stop at the end. The plot of *The Number of the Beast* doesn't even do this; it barely gets off the ground before being bogged down in interminable dialogue (more on that later), then dissipates entirely about two-thirds of the way through the novel. What there is goes something like this: At a campus party, Zeb, the nephew of the well-to-do hostess, Hilda, meets for the first time Deety Burroughs and her widower father, Jake. Deety describes the two as the original mad scientist and his beautiful daughter. A few minutes after meeting, Zeb and Deety decide to marry; Jake and Hilda, ostensibly going along as part of the wedding party, also decide to marry. They discover, on this rather hectic evening, that someone or something is trying to eliminate at least Jake, and probably all of them, because of an advanced mathematical breakthrough that Jake has just made.

Taking refuge in a handy hideaway, they find that Jake's "six-dimensional" discovery opens to them alternate universes to the number of the beast, which is 666, or in this case six to the sixth to the sixth power. They remodel Zeb's computer-run roadster/flyer into a time-space-interuniverses machine and take off to find a hiding place from the baddies, which are alien creatures from somewhere else who do not want humanity to know about universe-hopping.

From there, the novel becomes purely picaresque, as our two couples flit from one universe to another. Most of these universes are literary, based on works of fiction from our universe or Zeb-Deety-Jake-Hilda's (it turns out that theirs is not ours).

Now I've nothing against silly or unsubstantial plots. Some of the best books have minimal plots in terms of substance or weight; and it's all in how they're handled, needless to say. Mr. Heinlein's handling of this ephemeral plot is embarrassing in the extreme.

One of the universes visited is that of Alice's Wonderland (there

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is a picnic with Mr. Dodgson), and Heinlein may have overreacted to Alice's opening query of "What is the good of a book without pictures or conversations?" There are only a few pictures here (uninspired), but there is certainly conversation, pages and pages of it. The four major characters are *so* talkative that in the first two sections (of four) of the novel, there is barely a paragraph per chapter of action alone; nearly every word is of dialogue; and dialogue is not and has never been one of Heinlein's strong points. In the recent books, it has been particularly playful, coy, and whimsical, with all the characters sounding like sophomoric, swinging-single, senior citizens; the four here are no exception. The first-person narration is more or less rotated by chapter among the four; but since they're all always talking anyhow, it makes little difference "whose" chapter it is; and since they all sound alike, one soon gives up attempting to figure out which one is talking—and it becomes rapidly apparent that it doesn't really matter.

Another unfortunate aspect of all this dialogue is that when they're not being coyly sexy with each other, Deety-Zeb-Hilda-Jake are explaining things to each other, violating one of science fiction's basic rules of writing: that is if you have to convey your concepts to the reader by the characters' explanations to each other to the extent that it becomes obvious, something's wrong.

As you might gather, the plot proceeds very slowly through this gush of chatter; at one point early on, they spend a solid 22 pages deciding who's to lead this querulous quartet, an argument that recurs every chapter or so thereafter.

As for content, *The Number of the Beast* is apparently Heinlein's ultimate nostalgia trip. Deety is really D.T., which is really Dejah Thoris (Burroughs) while Zeb Carter's middle name is John (if you're not an Edgar Rice Burroughs buff, don't ask). This gives him a lot of opportunities to call her "my princess" and cart a sword around. The first other-universe place they visit is Mars, which they immediately dub Barsoom. They also bounce through the universe of the Lensmen; Wonderland (as mentioned above); and what may be Pellucidar, since it's all inside and no outside. I put my foot down when they landed in Oz, and did something I almost never allow myself the luxury of—I skipped. The idea of this dreadful foursome nattering around Glinda's palace was more than even my strong reviewer's stomach could bear. Unfortunately, this only gained me ten pages.

Thank goodness, before they get loose in Middle Earth or Gormenghast, Heinlein puts them where they should have gone in the

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first place, the Heinleinian universe. And guess who they run into? Lazarus Long and his clone sister/daughters, Lorelei Lee and Lapis Lazuli. You can imagine the gab fest that results from this—*seven* characters all sounding alike all talking at once—and three more people to argue with as to who's boss.

This is not to mention the two sentient ship/computers, who go all cute and giggly at each other; and most unnerving of all, Andrew Libby, the mathematical genius whom we first met way back in the short story "Misfit" and who has appeared in several other Heinlein works, turns up as a female through a complicated sex change.

Here we run into one of Heinlein's most pervasive themes, the male-as-female. It goes way back—the men in *Beyond This Horizon* chat about their nail polish, Lazarus Long's favorite wear is kilts. Heinlein let it all hang out (or tucked it all in, as it were) in *I Will Fear No Evil* with the male persona in the female body; and in *Time Enough For Love*, Lazarus Long's cloning himself as two females is another variation on the theme. It's an intriguing concept, worth exploring; but Heinlein's male/females spend most of their time calling everyone "dear" and having babies by the nearest nice guy.

Oh, yes—I forgot to mention that amid all the talk, this dreary crew succeeds in rescuing Lazarus's mother Maureen (also from *Time Enough For Love*) from the past, so here's an *eighth* voice running around telling everybody how luscious they're looking—tenth, counting the ships' computers. (Elizabeth Andrew Jackson Libby Long, thank goodness, doesn't say much, a welcome carryover from her former self.)

The last section of the book is quite chaotic. It's a sort of convention/party, containing all characters previously mentioned (still talking) plus real persons from the world of science fiction plus other characters from Heinlein books that I, for one, had prayed would be left in peace—Hazel Stone; the old windbag Jubal Harshaw; and Star, Empress of the Twenty Universes.

So, what *The Number of the Beast* ends up as is the ultimate fanzine publication. There are the requisite "in" references, a multitude of them, and even more to the point, an implied contempt for all those so "out" that they don't get them. As a result, the casual reader of science fiction will be totally bewildered by this book; the serious reader will be offput and bored by its juvenile content and style. A fanzine item like this can be amusing as an in joke among a small group, but it is embarrassing in professional print.

As a sort of postscript, I would like to take a paragraph of my (or more rightly, the reader's) space to answer some fairly broad swings

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Mr. Heinlein takes at critics in the new novel. It should be noted that some critics have not only read Edgar Rice Burroughs but have actually said nice things about him; and that critics also have doubts about critics, but can only put the question: What author, of all that egocentric breed, would be happy to have his work published to no notice whatsoever?

As for one critic, the week-long effort spent on composing this none-too-polished review has been one of the most difficult I've ever spent.

Joy Chant's *Red Moon and Black Mountain* became a minor classic in the 1960s, one reason for which being that it was, at the time, one of those rare books that had the quality of Tolkien without being a slavish imitation (they're still rare, come to think of it). After an incredibly long hiatus, she has given us another work that takes place in the world of *Red Moon*; this one is called *The Grey Mane of Morning*. It is, in a sense, a prequel (awful word, but useful) to the earlier novel, having to do with a period in the history of the Khentors, the nomadic horsemen of the plains.

I'm sorry to say that I found the first half of the book pretty slow going, despite some excellent writing. One learns a good deal more about the life of the Khentors than I, at least, want to know. Although Chant has invented many original details for this neolithic culture, one crowd of horsepeople is very like another and I felt like I'd spent several years with a tribe named Sioux.

There is also no fantasy element aside from the invented culture and the highly intelligent unicorns used as steeds by the men of the tribe, of which very little is made.

However, things pick up nicely around the middle of the novel with a spectacular walk-on by one of the local gods, and Mor'anh, our hero (and is he the heroic hero of all heros!) gets off his—er—prairie and visits the semi-mythical "Cities," a Bronze Age civilization already perilously close to decadence (the women paint their eyelids), but who are nice people nevertheless. They give the Khentors the swords they need to best the Golden Ones, who are not-so-nice people who have been extracting tribute from the nomads for untold ages, for no better reason than that they could get away with it. There is a rousing battle and everyone lives happily ever after.

I'm being a little too facetious at a worthwhile book's expense. *The Grey Mane of Morning* is nicely conceived and well written, many cuts above the barbarian sword-and-sorcery that it sounds like in synopsis. I guess I'm just a bit disenchanted with the noble

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savage number; I think Attila is much closer to reality than Hiawatha, and brave warriors who speak in the contractionless syntax of the movie Indian ("Paleface hunter does not want Laughing Grasshopper to be his blood brother?") turn me off.

A quick postscript on Joan Vinge's *The Snow Queen,* which I reviewed about two months ago: a perceptive friend pointed out that Vinge has followed the plot and *dramatis personae* of the strange Anderson fairy tale of the same name quite closely, which makes it all the more intriguing.

And a thought on the 1980 American Book Awards, not yet awarded as this is written. The fact that *The Book of the Dun Cow,* of all things, turns up on their list of nominees in the science fiction category says something about the knowledgeability of the nominating committee, I'm afraid.

Finally, a note on two recent publications from Owlswick Press: *Teaching Science Fiction: Education for Tomorrow* edited by Jack Williamson, and *The Ghosts of the Heaviside Layer and Other Fantasms* by Lord Dunsany, illustrated by Tim Kirk.

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STONEFOAL

by Sydney J. Van Scyoc

art: Frank Borth

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Our author reports herself to be in a familiar science-fictional situation—"in alien surroundings fighting unseen forces for survival"—save that in this case the environment is the one-acre remnant of a dairy farm and the unseen forces are gophers with which she is locked in a desperate struggle for the contents of her garden. Despite having to deal with the previous owner's thirty-year junk collection, she still finds time to write superb SF, such as the following story.

Noa huddled against the empty sheep shed watching the progress of the flocks toward their spring pastures. The sheep moved up the mountain slowly, their grey-streaked coats blending with the dark rock of the mountainside. Soon only the young herders would be visible in their bleached cloaks. Then even they would disappear.

Miserably, Noa pulled her own cloak tight around her slight shoulders. A few hours earlier her agemates had been called to their guilds. Some were already learning to turn the winter's wool to yarn, others to turn yarn to fabric or fabric to clothing. Those called to the field guilds were sharpening implements or preparing seed for spring planting. And others—

Others. That was her wound: all the others had been called and she had not. When her agemates had followed their guildmasters and the younger youths had gathered their flocks, Noa had been left alone in the youth hall. No one had noticed when she finally slipped away; no one had called her back to demand why she was unguilded.

No one *had* to ask. One look at her underdeveloped body was enough. She was as immature as when she had settled to wintersleep the autumn before, as immature as if her critical fifteenth winter had passed her by, leaving her still a child.

Bitterly she stood and slipped around the corner of the shed. She came face to face with Berger. Flinching, she stepped back.

"Noa, Magdana summons you." His voice was deep, unrelated to the reedy boy's voice of the previous fall.

Noa shriveled from his coolly assessing gaze. Berger had become a man in his sleep. His shoulders were broad now, his jaw bearded. Noa's differences—her hair, her eyes—had always stood between them. Now Berger looked at her as if she were a creature to be

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studied, not an agemate. "She—what does she want?"

Berger shrugged noncommittally. "She's been talking with your father."

And now she wanted to talk with Noa. "I'll go." Noa pushed past him and ran toward the stonehall, unwilling to betray her dread.

The stonehall was busy with the first bustle of spring. Sleep-pale adults were bundling winter bedding to the laundry rooms and trimming overgrown stalklamp from stone walls. The smells of the first spring baking came from the kitchen.

Long streamers of stalklamp still clung to the walls of Magdana's chamber, their brilliant orange glow rivaling the weak sunlight from the unshuttered windows. Juris Magdana was in one of her rare ruffled moments, her milky skin flushed, strands of white hair trailing from her woolen cap. Noa's father stood with winter-gaunt hands clutched, displeasure on his face. This was the time of day when he should have been in the fields, supervising the soil preparation.

"Berger said you summoned me," Noa reminded the two adults when they stared at her wordlessly.

Finally Juris Magdana nodded. "Yes. Ahren tells me you have failed to dream again."

Noa's hands twisted together. "I—I've never dreamed." Nor had she ever heard the mountain voices while she slept, the inhuman calls the others heard when sleepdust was scattered and the hall was sealed for winter.

Her apology irritated Magdana. "Child, it is no offense to fail to experience the winter phenomena."

Yet it must be. Why else did they ask so anxiously each spring if she had dreamed? Why else did they study her so closely now, frowning? "Another year," she offered uselessly. She knew that if she had not dreamed by her fifteenth spring, she would never dream.

Magdana's pale lips closed tight. "There have always been those who did not dream the Brakrath dreams. Once there were many of them."

Noa caught her breath. Would Magdana say it, what everyone thought and no one said? That Noa was a throwback to the early times, a genetic relic of the days before their people had adapted to Brakrath?

Noa's father cleared his throat. "Juris—" he said sharply.

Magdana's face paled into grimness. "Ahren, we have already talked."

"Then I will go to my work," he snapped. "There is no time to be

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wasted." His eyes swept to his daughter. "And no able body should be held back from work."

"So you have argued and I have rejected your argument," Magdana reminded him. "Go."

He left the chamber with an angry clatter and Noa was alone with the grim-jawed Magdana. Arguments chattered through her mind. How could she be a throwback when she had survived fifteen wintersleeps without difficulty? When she could climb Terlath's steep slopes with the same ease as her agemates, when she required no more food to maintain her body weight than any other person her age?

But she had not matured through the winter. And she was unguilded in her fifteenth spring. She peered at Magdana in agony.

"You know the principles of selection and adaptation," Magdana reminded her finally. "You have seen the histories."

"Yes." No one knew how many centuries it had taken the stranded humans to make the physical adaptation to Brakrath's harsh conditions. But over those centuries, the least fit had gradually been bred out, replaced by today's sturdy, white-haired, pale-eyed people. Noa touched the silken auburn hair that set her apart as surely as her inability to dream. She wore it tightly knotted, hoping to make it less conspicuous. And her eyes, not the ice blue of the glacier but a warm hazel . . . "I've read the scrolls."

"And I'm sure you know how our breeders have manipulated the stock to produce breeds to meet our needs. The sheep, the soup-fowl—they were very different once."

"I know." Frowning, Noa peered at her hands, long and slender. Even if she someday heard the mountain voices, would that make her hair dense and white, her fingers short and muscular like Magdana's?

Magdana sighed irritably. "Child, I am not discussing human selection. I'm discussing something our breeders have never undertaken until now—the manipulation of native stock."

Noa's head snapped up. "There is no domesticated native stock."

"Surely you know that last autumn, just before wintersleep, we received an animal from the southern halls, a ruminant prevalent in that area."

"The redmane?" Noa had seen the animal in its pen, an angry creature, snorting and stamping and tossing its matted head. "It has no use for us."

Magdana's eyes narrowed. "So your father says, vehemently."

Nodding, Noa recited her father's arguments. "It doesn't produce

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milk to repay its fodder. Its meat is tough and its droppings are too acid to be used in the fields. And it's wild."

"Yet in the south the breeders have captured an entire herd of redmane and are working with them to produce an animal that does have use. Most are not amenable, but one of the bucks has been trained to the plow. And the mare they sent us was bred to him. Our breeders plan to work with her after she has foaled."

Noa frowned. "My father says it will require more work-hours to make the animal pull than if the workers had driven the plow themselves."

"Then you don't believe the breed can be improved? As our breeders have improved the sheep over the centuries?"

"The redmane is a native breed."

Magdana sighed heavily. "By now we are all native breeds, child."

Noa felt the remark as a personal rebuke. *Except me?* Had there never been others who failed to mature over wintersleep? Others with auburn hair and hazel eyes who had been accepted anyway?

Silence stretched between them, strained. Magdana stood. "The redmane has tempered down since fall. We want to pasture it for the summer and begin training it in the fall. You are to lead it to pasture beyond where Berger's brothers have taken their flock and care for it when it foals. If you find yourself in a position where you must sacrifice either the mother or the foal, bring us back the mother. The foal can't survive without her. The ewes won't foster it."

Noa's anger, never far below the surface, bubbled up. "You wouldn't send any other person my age to the slopes this year."

Magdana's eyes grew stony. "I would not."

"I can do the same work as the others my age."

"I'm sure you can. But you are different from your agemates. You always have been. We have all recognized it. Perhaps the difference is meaningless. I will never know if I continue to treat you as I treat the others."

"Juris—" But she faltered, unwilling to betray the depth of her bitterness.

"The animal may have no apparent use now, but I want it guarded well. The foal may be valuable," Magdana said with finality.

"Yes," Noa managed. When Magdana said nothing more, Noa retreated, her heart hammering. She had never been openly ostracized before. It helped little that her father had apparently argued against Magdana's intent. Noa knew he had done so out of hard practicality.

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She slipped to her family quarters. Launders were stripping the heavy bedding from the beds and bundling it for the wash kettles. They glanced at Noa with silent curiosity. Gathering up spare clothing and her pack, Noa escaped their scrutiny.

When she had filled her pack from the kitchen shelves—again working quickly to escape silent scrutiny—she went to the breeding area. The redmane stood in a dim corner of its pen, its ruddy mane streaming tangled to its ankles, mingling with its coarse grey body hair. It stood firmly on fours, unlike many Brakrathi species, and its shoulders came barely to Noa's waist. Despite its small stature, it gave the impression of muscular power.

It was also enormously pregnant and it regarded her with mute rebellion. A muffled snort underscored the animal's mood. Its smell was heavy, earthen.

Noa stepped into the pen and thrust one foot forward. The gesture, which would have prompted her sheep into ecstasies of head rubbing, did not move the redmane. The animal shook its tangled mane and pressed itself farther into the corner. Frowning, Noa crooned to the animal.

"She won't come to you."

Noa jumped back. Korin, of the breeders' guild, had stepped into the pen. Her pale eyes seemed disdainful. "You have to tie rope to her neck and coax her. Then if you're lucky, she'll decide to go the same direction you're going after a while."

Korin's gaze stung. "Why haven't you sheared her?" Noa asked.

Korin shook her head, rejecting the accusation. "She needs hair to make a nest for her foal. She'll start pulling it a few hours before she's ready to deliver. You'll have to keep her penned or she'll nest in a crevice and you won't be able to get near the foal."

"She can't graze shut in a pen."

"You take her out to graze, on her rope. And don't bother making the pen too high. She can't jump more than waist high and the predators can get in no matter how high you make it."

Noa chilled. She had lost sheep to mountain predators, one or two almost every year. But there was only one redmane to begin with. She nodded numbly as Korin detailed the animal's care. Finally Korin fetched a stout rope and looped it around the animal's neck. "Here, you may as well learn how to get her moving."

The rope disappeared into the animal's coarse hair. Noa wound the other end around her wrist and stepped firmly toward the gate. The animal did not follow.

Korin sighed in exasperation. "I'll get you started. Use a handful

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of feed—here, this way."

Together they coaxed the obdurate animal from its pen and led it through the livestock area. After a while it padded after them in mute resignation, pondersome on its short legs, its mane falling over its eyes.

"Just keep her moving," Korin instructed. "Once she stops, you have to start her all over again."

This was the animal with which she was to spend an entire warm season? And she couldn't even pause to indulge her sinking sense of desertion as Korin turned back. If she let the animal stop now . . .

Doggedly Noa kept the redmane trotting until they reached the lower flank of the mountain. High above she could distinguish a few scattered flocks working their way toward pasture. She had no desire to overtake them with her coarse-haired charge. She slowed her pace and the animal slowed accordingly.

By mid-afternoon both Noa and the animal had tired. Pausing, Noa let the redmane browse. Then she urged it forward again by waving tufts of tender grass under its nose. Twice she left the trail to avoid overtaking slow-moving flocks of sheep.

It was dusk when she reached the way-cabin Magdana had directed her to use. For the first time since leaving the valley, she experienced the full weight of her desolation. It was chill on the mountainside. Mist obscured the valley below. Night shadow already gathered around the tumbled rocks that surrounded the stone cabin.

Holding the redmane's rope firmly, Noa pushed open the cabin door. Bedding and cooking implements were in order, but overgrown stalklamp stems lit the tiny cabin's interior garishly. There would be trimming to do before she slept.

The animal tugged at the rope, pulling toward a patch of fresh vegetation. Momentarily Noa slackened her grip, then snatched at the rope in alarm. She couldn't let the animal go. And there was no pen to hold it.

Bleakly she peered at the animal. Suddenly her sense of isolation was terrible. She had never come to pasture alone before. There had always been a brother, a sister, cousins, even if there had been a distance between them, the distance normal youths put between themselves and a changeling. And there had been the sheep, nudging her legs, rubbing their forelocks against her boot tops, demanding her attention. At night they had remained gathered near the cabin, waiting for her to emerge.

If she left the redmane, it would vanish. And it wouldn't return

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at her summons.

She had no choice but to pen it in the cabin for the night.

The animal accepted her decision with a rebellious snort. Noa gathered stalks of green vegetation to sweeten its imprisonment. When the door shut behind it, the animal moved restlessly around the small space, nudging overgrown stalklamp with its nose. Hurriedly Noa trimmed back the luminous stems and swept them outside.

She waited until the animal gravitated to one corner of the tiny room before opening her pack. She kept a wary eye on the beast as she ate. At last she hung the pack on a high hook and settled into the narrow bed, resigned to a sleepless night. The redmane peered at her dully from beneath its tangled forelock.

Without realizing how tired she was, Noa slept.

They reached the assigned pasture on the third day. The tiny cabin Noa was to occupy for the summer seemed set at the center of silence. Above, Terlath's rugged peaks fingered the sky, reaching for the midday sun. The trail narrowed and disappeared a short distance beyond the cabin. Noa's nearest neighbors lay an hour's walk below. Above lay only the cavern-riddled peaks and the predators who inhabited them.

Shivering, Noa tugged the resisting redmane into the cabin, then slipped out, barring the door. She closed her ears to its noisy protest. It had fought her all morning, screaming shrilly with every step. Noa's hands were raw with rope burn. She didn't intend to share cabin space with it again. Early each morning it loomed over her, challenging her with an intent stare, then padded around the tiny cabin uttering piercing shrills.

Quickly she began gathering stone to build a pen. Wood was scarce at this altitude, to be found only in tough, gnarled pieces. As she worked, she glanced occasionally toward the peaks. Far above a single silverwing soared, testing its wings on the chill air. If she had its eyes, to see what predators might be near . . .

But she had only human eyes. There were not even any sheep to warn her of a predator's approach.

Should she feel drawn to the peaks? From the beginning, the stranded humans had claimed that the mountains exercised mystic power over them, drawing them, sustaining them, surging with unnameable energies. From the first there had been tales of young herders who had summoned the mountain's power in extremity and overpowered a threatening predator.

Yet she had never felt any mystic alliance to Terlath's rocky

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slopes. She had never been attracted to Terlath by anything more than the necessity of grazing her sheep, had never felt it pulsate with power, had never felt that in crisis she could draw upon its strength.

Nor had she ever dreamed the winter dreams or heard the mountain voices.

Preoccupied, she piled stone upon stone until she had created a small pen. Would the animal rebel against its confines? Or simply retreat to one corner and eye Noa resentfully? She did not even know when the creature was due to foal. The gestation period had not yet been established.

Despite Korin's advice, she built the pen chest high, creating a makeshift gate of twisted tree limbs. Then she heaped grass stalks in the center of the pen and fought the redmane from the cabin into the pen.

Even fresh forage did not improve the taste of captivity. The animal padded around the tiny pen at a canter, snorting and tossing its matted head, its eyes glittering. But to Noa's relief it did not attempt to tumble the stone walls of the pen. Leaving it to its protests, she went to gather soup thistle for her evening meal.

Over the next few days Noa developed a daily pattern that was only partially satisfactory. The redmane, impatient with confinement, paced its pen half the night, alternately snorting and uttering shrill cries. Several times Noa carried her bedding outside and spread it on the ground, maintaining vigil. Once she heard the bellow of a crag-charger in the distance. At that sound, the redmane did not scream but became very still, staring at Noa intently. Fortunately the charger's next bellow was faint, barely audible.

The redmane quieted with dawn and Noa snatched a few hours' sleep. When she emerged from the cabin near midday, the animal approached its makeshift gate pondersomely, grunting, pushing its head forward for the rope.

They spent the middle of the day at pasture, the redmane's rope looped casually around Noa's wrist. She knew she could trust the redmane only so long as they were joined. The animal watched her covertly when it was not peering vigilantly around the mountainside. Noa never made the mistake of relinquishing the rope.

She studied the animal narrowly for signs that it was ready to foal. Beneath the voluminous coat, its abdomen grew with each day's grazing. And there was something new in its mood, as if it were waiting—watching and waiting. Half-consciously Noa began waiting too. With each day an unaccountably heightening sense of

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anticipation displaced more of her lonely bitterness.

On the fifth night the sense of anticipation was particularly keen. The animal's penetrating cries woke her three times, bringing her to the door each time to peer out across the stony pasture. Nindra and Zan sailed high in a clear sky, silvering grass and stone. Beyond the cabin nothing moved.

But on the fourth summons, Noa heard the clatter of rock. She froze, shrinking against the cabin wall, every muscle taut. She had seen the tracks of breeterlik yesterday when she took the redmane to graze. And on clear spring nights, ragers traveled in packs, clawing anything that moved.

Instead of becoming still, the redmane raced to the farthest corner of its pen, threw back its tangled head, and uttered a piercing scream. The cry shivered through Noa's consciousness, gripping her. Again she heard the clatter of rock, nearer now, just above them. She inched toward the door. She had only a blunt pike for defense. Roped to the redmane most of her waking hours, she hadn't even had time to sharpen it.

Then Noa saw the creature that stalked them. It emerged from a tumble of boulders and trotted across the pasture, moving on all fours with an odd loping grace. It was a second redmane, its mane trailing, its muscular strength apparent even beneath its dense coat of coarse hair. It cantered toward the pen, tossing its head as Noa had seen her own redmane do, uttering a series of throaty grunts.

Noa stood frozen, the hair at the back of her neck rising. She had never seen her own redmane run free, had never realized the odd grace of the species.

Nor had she ever seen any other redmane on Terlath's slopes. It was her understanding that they inhabited the southern plains exclusively.

The second redmane reached the pen and thrust its head over the stone wall. The two animals rubbed their heads together, grunting and snorting and stamping their padded feet. Once Noa's redmane uttered the barest echo of its shrilling cry.

"You called him," Noa realized. The redmane had not been screaming in fear but to summon her kind. With that realization, Noa stepped around the corner of the pen and peered into the rocks from which the second animal had come. She saw no sign that others gathered there. And she heard no sound over the greeting snorts and grunts of the two animals.

Cautiously she approached the second redmane. Preoccupied, it

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did not shy as she examined it, lifting first one hairy paw, then another. The tough pads on the soles of its feet were split and torn, as if it had traveled a great distance. And around its neck, she saw upon closer examination, were the traces of a leather harness.

It had come from the southern hall, come from the fields where the breeders' guild thought it would willingly pull the plow, had come through rugged mountain passes to find its mate. And Noa had anticipated its coming, her diffuse sense of expectation a bare echo of the mare's urgent certainty.

Later she would wonder what had moved her next, what instinct bred of the common soil she trod with the redmanes. Without thinking, she stepped to the crudely erected gate and threw aside its twisted members.

How had the redmane found its mate in all the mountains of Brakrath? As the pregnant animal she had coaxed and tugged unwillingly up the trail padded through the open gate, it was enough that they were joined again, enough that they muzzled playfully before padding away toward the boulders. Loose rock clattered under their feet. For a moment they were primal figures, limned by moonlight. Then they were shadows.

Finally they were gone. Noa peered into the boulders for a long time before she returned to the cabin and barred the door.

She was wakened the next morning by a rapping at the door. She responded with hair tangled and blankets tented around her shoulders, roused from her soundest sleep since she had left the stonehall.

Berger's youngest brother greeted her, face flushed. "You should know, Noa—we lost three ewes and two lambs to ragers last night. Marid told me to come warm you."

Normally Noa would have experienced a sharp pang of fear. It was difficult enough to guard stock against a single member of any of the larger predator species. It was almost impossible when the predators were tiny, vicious whirls of claws that traveled in packs. But today she said only, "I'm sorry to hear." Her voice was distant, unaffected.

Perrid stared at her, his pale forehead creasing. Then he saw the empty pen. "Where is the redmane?"

"I let them go," Noa heard herself say. "Both of them."

"Both?"

"Yes, both." Realizing he expected something more, she drew her blanket tighter. "I will come tell you if I see signs of ragers. I heard a crag-charger several nights ago but he didn't come near." Her

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obligation fulfilled, she swung the door shut.

Later she wondered what he thought as he turned back down the trail, what he told his brother and cousins.

The breeders thought they could domesticate the redmanes, thought they *had* domesticated at least one. But the animals lived by their own law and the breeders had not learned that law. Certainly Magdana had not known that the redmane would travel the mountains to find its mate.

There was a lot Magdana did not know, a lot no one knew.

Would any of them guess for instance why Noa packed her possessions and left the cabin in search of the redmanes? How could they imagine what voices called her when no resident of the stonehalls had heard those voices before?

She tied her hair into a knot, slung her pack over one shoulder and left the cabin. The mountain that had never spoken to her did not speak now. It lay silent and still underfoot. Yet something guided her over the rocks and greening pastures, guided her to the redmanes' faint trail.

Sometimes she walked hours at a time without seeing sign of the animals' passage. Yet she knew the direction to take and took it, winding up and down the mountain's flank at an oblique angle. As she walked, she did not wonder why she followed the redmanes. She simply let her feet carry her.

She slept alone on the mountainside the first night, waking a dozen times at faint sounds. Later she slid behind a towering boulder as a rock leopard stalked unseen prey through the tumbled rocks, its sinuous form slipping in and out of shadow. A tiny scream minutes later told Noa the hunt had been successful. Shivering, she remained hidden until morning.

It was late the next afternoon when she approached the rocky defile where the redmanes had taken shelter. The animals regarded her warily. The mare had pulled its coarse hair and trampled it into a deep, springy nest. She lay in the nest, clothed only in a soft undercoat of silver-grey fur. For the first time Noa could see the structural delicacy that balanced the muscular power of shoulders and haunches. The animal had stripped itself even of its mane. It gazed up at her with strangely vulnerable eyes.

"I won't take you back," she said quietly.

Did she mean it? The buck had refused to remain as a plow animal when his mate was mountains away and heavy with foal. If they were permitted to stay together, might he work? Plowing the stony fields was backbreaking labor for humans. Too often field workers

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were stiffened by degenerative diseases years before their time. Had Noa the authority to decide that the attempt to domesticate the redmanes be abandoned?

The foal was born early the next morning, squirming and alert, soft in its silvery coat. It stood as soon as its fur dried and uttered a tiny shrill that brought answering grunts from both parents.

For two days Noa camped in the rocky defile while the animals coddled their foal. On the second day they let her approach and touch its plush flanks. She knew she had only to slip her rope around the foal's neck and lead it away and the parents would follow—follow all the way back to the valley.

She took the rope from her pack and formed a loop. Buck and mare eyed her uneasily, grunting anxiously to each other. Yet neither of them moved to push her away from their foal.

They knew she would not place the rope on its neck. Sighing, Noa put the rope away and brought fresh grass as an offering of conscience. If she were meant to return the redmanes to the valley, she would know, just as the buck had known where to find his mate.

On the third day the redmanes left the defile, padding past the place where Noa sat, pack at her side. Buck and mare walked with the foal between them, doubly guarded.

Their path across Terlath's flanks seemed random. Yet Noa realized that they always ended the day facing south, even though they made no attempt to descend the mountain and follow the interlocking valleys that would lead them to their own mountains. They stayed well above the meadows where youths from Noa's stonehall herded sheep. Sometimes, pausing, Noa looked down upon the flocks and their herders. She felt no kinship with them now, felt no desire to descend and ask news of the valley.

This is my dream, she realized one morning as she sat over a breakfast of freshly gathered berries while the redmanes grazed nearby. All her life she had waited to dream while she slept, to hear voices the others said came from the mountain. But she was not like the others. Her dream was meant to be experienced waking. The voices she was meant to hear were her own.

In her dream she followed the redmanes in their wanderings, followed them and learned the laws of their breed—as no breeder had troubled to do. They were not laws that could be written or even spoken. They were the laws of alien senses, laws that governed the choice of path, of pasture, of mate. They were laws that insured the life of the individual and ultimately of the species.

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Noa began to understand those laws.

At the same time she began to hear her own voices, voices that did not shame her for her differences. She freed her auburn hair from its knot and let it flow. She left her arms exposed to the midday sun and they browned. Her face took on a deep bronze tone. She peered at it in mountain pools before drinking, hardly recognizing it. The features had become mature, pronounced.

Yet she still did not hear the voice that urged her body to mature. She followed the redmanes, listening for it.

All dreams end. The summer idyll of the redmanes ended on a bright afternoon near a mountain spring. Stonefoal, as Noa had named the new foal, flew across the grass on joyful legs and darted toward the water. Splashing, he plunged into the basin of cold spring water. Noa felt as if she ran with him, his delight her own.

Too late she realized why both parents stared into the clear pool uttering first sharp grunts and then warning shrills. She had not yet learned how they greeted the intrusion of a stingmadder.

Nor had Stonefoal learned of the stingmadder. Reveling, the foal didn't see the darting shape on the surface of the water.

The law of the redmanes came into effect then. Crying out shrilly, the mare hung back while the buck thudded forward, bellowing at the foal. Stonefoal glanced up, momentarily distracted from the delight of the water. Tossing his head, he finally noticed the gliding shape. At his mother's fourth shrill, he realized the shape was to be feared. But his legs thrashed spasmodically and refused to carry him away.

His father's legs were more sure. They thrust him between his foal and the stingmadder. And although the buck flung his head up sharply as he entered the water, the stingmadder's poisoned barb found the buck's tender nose and penetrated it.

As buck and foal thrashed from the water, Noa caught her breath painfully. She knew how stingmadder venom affected sheep and humans. And there was no antidote, no remedy at all. Perhaps the redmane had some native tolerance.

Both buck and mare knew they did not. The buck cantered away across the grass, snorting and pounding, shaking his head. The mare placed her body between him and their foal, shrilling warning. Anxiously she nudged the foal toward the shelter of a nearby tumble of rock.

The venom-madness took the buck within moments. His eyes glazed and his breath shuddered in his chest. Lowering his head,

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he halted momentarily, glaring across the meager space that separated him from his family. The mare froze, trying to become rock, immobile, invulnerable. But she could not control the cold trembling that shook her.

That motion was enough to incite the maddened buck. With a terrible scream he launched himself at her, teeth bared, padded feet pounding.

The mare uttered a sound that was more whimper than cry. She pressed the foal against the rocks, driving it to its knees, and braced herself to withstand her mate's assault.

The dream was shattered but Noa had moved with the redmanes long enough to take their laws for her own. Stiffly she shrugged away her encumbering pack and took pike in hand. She had paused to sharpen it days before, anticipating mountain predators.

Now she thrust it against madness.

The mare's whimper was her own as she threw herself between the threatened animals and the charging buck. She heard herself sob as she lifted the pike. She had been born into new consciousness at Stonefoal's birth. She had become bonded to the three animals, to their breed. Their flesh was her own. Now she seemed to thrust the sharpened pike against herself.

Guided by crisis, she placed the pike expertly between the bony ribplates that guarded the buck's heart. The buck's own velocity drove the pike deep. Stricken, the animal stopped in his tracks, his glazed eyes clearing momentarily. Then he shuddered and fell.

Silence lay across spring and meadow. Noa removed the pike from the buck's heart and the barb from his nose. Then she erected a cairn of stone over his body and led his mate and foal away. They mourned together, mare, foal and guardian as their feet led them down the rugged slope toward the valley.

It seemed she had been gone longer than the first quarter of a season. Everything had contracted: stock pens, outbuildings, stonehall. Even the people who stood staring as she passed, Stonefoal in her arms, had become smaller. Their faces were pinched and pale. If any of her family were among them, she passed without recognizing them.

Nor did they recognize her.

Even Magdana had shrunk when Noa confronted her in her chambers. She stood up from her chair, peering up at Noa uncomprehendingly.

"I saved the foal and its mother," Noa said when Magdana did

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not speak. "The buck was lost to a stingmadder."

Magdana licked her lips nervously, finally recognizing Noa. "We—yes, we had a runner from the south. He told us the buck they had trained to plow broke his traces when he was taken to begin the spring plowing."

So he had made the journey to Terlath in a matter of days, tearing his feet mercilessly on rocky trails to be with his mate when she foaled. "What did they tell you about the breed? Did they tell you any of the things I have learned?"

Magdana attempted to recapture her composure. "I don't know what you have learned, Noa."

"And I can't tell you." Carefully Noa set the foal down. "He will need a mate in three years. His mother will need one when she comes into season again this fall."

"They—yes." But Magdana did not look at the foal or mare. She stared at Noa. "Will they pull the plow for us one day? Do you know?"

"I think they may," Noa said distantly. It seemed perfectly natural that Magdana should ask her. "I think they will come to live on our land for short periods if we make it theirs."

"I see. The breeders will have to work with their bloodlines, of course," Magdana ventured, testing her.

"The breeders work with the bloodlines of sheep and soupfowl," Noa said with a faint lash of scorn. "And humans—because we came from elsewhere and we have had to change to survive on Brakrath. The redmane has always lived on Brakrath. They don't need to change."

Magdana frowned. "If they are to serve us—"

Noa shook her head. "They will not serve us. They will live with us and permit us to live with them. Perhaps they will even learn our laws if enough of us learn theirs. If they work for us, it will be because they choose to help us."

A great silence stretched between Noa and Magdana. Finally Magdana sat again, as if supremely tired. "You were always different, Noa."

Noa glanced down at herself. She was fully mature now. She had become so at the buck's death. Her arms and legs were long, powerful and deeply bronzed. Her eyes glinted copper. She was taller than any resident of the stonehall, darker—stiller. She had become still on the mountain while she listened to her own voices.

"It is so hard to tell the outcome when a child is born different. Brakrath has changed us so much over the centuries, selecting for

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the qualities which best permit us to survive here. Looking at an infant, how can I tell if she is a throwback who will struggle to survive, and perhaps fail, or a—" Magdana frowned "—a forerunner? The bearer of a gift we have never seen before, come to foreshadow the appearance of still other gifts. I'm afraid the bearers of new gifts are often lonely, Noa."

She had been, from birth. Sighing, Noa scooped Stonefoal into her arms. She hadn't realized until now how far and in what direction her voices had led her. Listening to them, she had crossed the boundary into maturity—and left the fellowship of the stonehalls behind.

Would she turn back if she could? Turn back and surrender all she had learned, not just of the redmanes but, through them, of Brakrath, her land? "I must take the mare south to find a mate," she said finally. "There must be a period of bonding before she comes into season in the fall."

"You'll mate her with one of the herd the breeders hold at the southern halls?"

"She will choose her own mate when we reach the south." She hugged the silver foal, flesh of her dream, substance of the voices that had guided her. "We will leave tomorrow." But something still seemed unsaid. She groped for it.

Magdana found it for her. "Would you like to be formally initiated into one of the guilds before you go? The breeders' guild perhaps?"

Noa considered it. Guild status would be proof against complete isolation from her kind. But she was of another kind now, an older kind, a calmer kind. She would not be lonely. "No," she said. "It's no longer necessary."

ET TU

I met a lizard who said to me
Although you're king over all you see
Remember
  there was once a time
When all of this was truly mine
And God was green
  with scaly skin

—John Stallings

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THE QUEER STORY OF GARDNER'S MAGAZINE
by Martin Gardner

One of the least known of all science fiction tales by H. G. Wells is "The Queer Story of Brownlow's Newspaper." It appeared in *The Ladies Home Journal*, April 1932, and has never been reprinted in any book.

Because of some strange time warp, a newspaper dated November 10, 1971, is delivered to Brownlow forty years ahead of time. The story is mainly a description of what was in the paper. Wells made a few lucky hits (such as lower birth rates, emphasis on psychological motivation in fiction, attempts to utilize heat below the earth's surface, wider coverage of science news), but these are balanced by Wells's misses (simplifed English spelling, world government, no financial pages, 13-month calendar, the gorilla has become extinct, and others.)

Last January I had an experience similar to Brownlow's. A copy of what I assumed would be the January 1980 issue of *Scientific American* arrived in the mail. Incredibly, it was dated January 2556! The printing was peculiar, and the language hard to understand, but the illustrations were spectacular—all in full color and three-dimensional. Many of them moved when you tilted the page.

I turned at once to the Mathematical Games column. Written by someone using the obvious pseudonym of Nitram Rendrag, the column was devoted entirely to number puzzles involving the date of the new year. Here is a selection of six I could understand.

1. Scramble the digits of 2556 any way you like and enter the number in your calculator. Multiply it by any digit, add 100, and divide by 3. The quotient always has a fraction of 1/3. Why?

2. Inside the nine squares on the next page, put the digits 1 through 9, using each digit just once. Arrange them so the rows add to the numbers shown on the right, and the three three-digit numbers add to 2556. The pattern is unique.

3. Between any adjacent pair of digits in the sequence

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

insert either a plus sign or a minus sign or nothing at all. Digits without signs between them form larger numbers. For example: 123 − 45 − 67 + 89 = 100. This is the only way, said Rendrag, to obtain a sum of 100 with as few as three signs.

Your task is to use as many plus or minus signs as you like to

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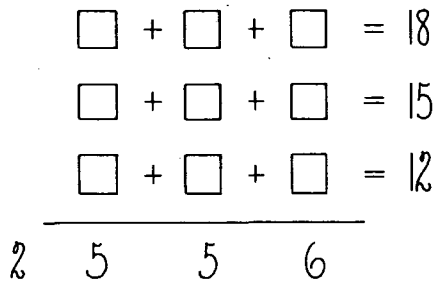

make the sum 556. There is only one solution.

4. Using just three plus or minus signs make the sum 56. This also has just one answer.

5. Form an expression for 56 using the digit 4 no more than three times, plus any of the following symbols: +, −, x, ÷, ! (the factorial sign), the radical sign, the decimal point, and parentheses. Exponents may be shown, but repeating decimal fractions cannot be indicated by a dot above a number. A permitted symbol may be used as often as you wish.

6. Circle any number in the matrix below, then cross out its row and column. Circle any number not crossed out, and again eliminate its row and column. Repeat this two more times. Circle the only remaining number. Add the five circled numbers. The sum will be 56. Why does this seeming miracle always work?

As customary, Rendrag withheld his answers until the following month. On page 60 you'll find what I believe to be the solutions.

10	12	13	9	11
9	11	12	8	10
13	15	16	12	14
11	13	14	10	12
8	10	11	7	9

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THE WORTH OF A MAN

by Tim Colley

art: Marc Schirmeister

Mr. Colley describes himself as a non-talented carpenter, designer, and swimming-pool assembler. He traveled extensively through the Orient, Europe, and especially Scandinavia; his languages include French, German, and Cantonese.

"Fish rustling is a heinous crime," thundered the judge, "and the court will ensure you pay the maximum penalty!" The prisoner, a nondescript little man, cringed before him.

It was a bizarre case, thought Petronius the Deducer. When four cubic miles of live fish vanished overnight from the North Sea ranches of United Europe, he had been called in to handle the investigation. A quick scan of the monitoring satellite films convinced him that this was a crime at government level.

Somehow, the fluorescing organisms in the feedstock supplied to the fish had been nullified: the proud rose blush of England, the effete mauve of France, Switzerland's gold, and Luxembourg's chartreuse all faded out of the black night sea simultaneously. And at about the same time, the hydrophones picked up a confused rushing as billions of finny forms penetrated the bubble curtains . . . then nothing.

It was Petronius who discovered the cable laid across the seabed and subsequently traced it over two thousand kilometers to a huge new cannery, heavily camouflaged, on the shores of Novaya Zemlya. Weeks of computer analysis by him also turned up massive purchases by an unknown party of a new improved detergent that (surprise) actually worked. And the last element in the puzzle fell into place when he proved that ultra-low frequency electrical pulses along the cable could have swerved the fish off their normal aimless

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meandering and oriented them, purged of their intestinal colour-tagging, to swim along it and eventually into the cannery intake.

But when the automated plant was raided, the only person he was able to capture was a janitor whose nationality remained a total mystery. Nor was there any sign of the fish.

"It is our intention to make an awful example of you," intoned the judge.

"Your honour, in this case I feel it's hardly worth it," Petronius murmured in the judicial ear. "He's a nothing, a nobody. His masters will be totally deaf to his plight. In fact, I can guarantee it. Try to see him for what he is: merely a deflective herring aide."

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TRANS DIMENSIONAL IMPORTS

by Sharon N. Farber
art: Linda Miller

The author reports that med school is taking up entirely too much of her time and that the Gross Anatomy Lab is all too aptly named—none of which has anything to do with this *story.*

The scenery outside the window of the suburbs-bound commuter train was as grey and formless as the front page of the *Wall Street Journals* that stared at Janice from her fellow passengers' laps. The train had barely left the brick tenement outskirts for the open-topped tunnels when the man beside Janice folded his newspaper and looked at the man in the aisle seat.

"Seen the new Shakespeare yet?"

"No, but I hear Williamson's a great Mercutio."

"Yeah. Those ads. 'You loved Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet*, now see his further adventures, from the pen of the Immortal Bard.' Etcetera. All these new classics, lost masterpieces, completed fragments—you know what I think they should bring over?"

"No, what?" The businessmen looked interchangeable, but the second's voice had a slight reedy quality.

"The rest of *Edwin Drood.* By Dickens, you know? Read it as a kid. Dickens died before telling who the murderer was."

Janice groaned silently. At the next stop she got up and walked into another car, finding a place beside a housewife returning from a day in the city. The rack was full of Bloomingdale's packages, so Janice kept her briefcase on her lap. To her increasing dismay, the housewife produced a new hardcover copy of *Thrones, Dominations.*

"The latest Peter Wimsey. Are you a Dorothy Sayers fan?"

Janice shrugged noncommittally. The window briefly showed a road, clogged with cars and lined with dirty snow. Then the view disappeared behind another embankment.

"It was written in 1943. Why didn't they publish it until now?"

Janice sighed. "Because the Dorothy Sayers in this world didn't write it. But on a neighboring reality plane she did. Of course, the publisher pays royalties to her estate, as a matter of courtesy."

"That's what the papers say. Alternate worlds—it's all too sci-fi in my opinion."

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Purely out of reflex, Janice opened her mouth to begin on probability shells, the Schrodinger's cat analogy, and the propagation of alternities, then stopped. "This isn't a press conference," she thought. "You've been on so long you've forgotten how to be off."

The lady continued, "If another world's there, why can't we visit it? And why didn't we know about it until now?"

"Nothing interpenetrates but the mutable vibration of . . . Nothing can go between the worlds but a—a sort of energy that can be used as a binary code for communication. And it turns out that to reach another plane, sender and listener both have to be searching for the signal. Try to imagine a telephone conversation that can only occur if both parties lift their receivers and dial simultaneously."

"That sounds difficult."

"This other—well—dimension, Earth Two, is so similar to ours that the same scientist was experimenting along the same lines in both alternities, and in effect contacted herself."

"Oh yes, that Miss Clark. I saw her on the news. Never married, you know."

"Dr. Clark," Janice snapped, calming herself with the happy reflection that she didn't look much like her publicity photo.

The woman was fingering her book lovingly. "Imagine. Harriet and Peter have three sons."

Janice let herself slide into a white-noise reverie, the woman's opinions flowing in one ear and out the other. She thought back to her conversation with Jan that morning.

—SAW TITUS ANDRONICUS LAST NIGHT. NOT SO GREAT.

—We got the better deal with *Mercutio*.

—AND SPOKE WITH A WRITER DURING INTERMISSION.

Janice had laughed, then typed her answer.

—My condolences.

—HE KNEW A LITTLE ABOUT PARALLEL WORLDS; THOUGHT OUR PLANES SHOULD BE MORE DISSIMILAR SINCE OUR LITERARY CORPUS IS DIFFERENT.

—Disturbed over how little authors affect history?

—INSULTED. STILL UPSET WHEN I TOLD HIM HOW SOME POLITICIANS WEREN'T IMPORTANT EITHER.

—Did you explain about eventual inertia? Branching polarization?

—I'M TIRED OF EXPLAINING.

—Me too. Thank goodness we don't have to deal with live authors.

—ESTATES ARE ENOUGH TROUBLE. YOU SHOULD HEAR THE LAWYERS

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RGUING OVER MISSOUSKI'S.

—Then I guess we're lucky Earth One never had a Missouski. ny sales will be pure gravy. I'll be finding out about his sales oday—trip to the city time.

—WRITE IF YOU FIND WORK. NO WAIT, WHAT DID AUNT BESS ALWAYS AY? "DON'T BE A STRANGER. DROP ME A POSTCARD."

Janice thought, " 'Having a wonderful time, wish you were here'." an was her best friend, closer than the most identical of identical wins, but at the same time she was only words on a screen.

The van was waiting at the station, its blue and gold Trans Dinensional Imports paint scheme making it readily visible amongst he mire of waiting vehicles. "Beats a raccoon tail on the antenna," anice muttered. As usual, people were staring at the van and its assengers.

"Good trip, Dr. Clark?" her secretary asked, easing the van into raffic.

"Fair, Lila," Janice replied. "Oh, God!"

"Something wrong?"

"No, keep going." In the crowd at the station she'd glimpsed a amiliar-looking figure, a man who stood and moved like Robert lliot, the man she'd nearly married eight years earlier. A false ighting no longer gave her a tight feeling in the chest or made her yes well with tears; all she felt was an academic curiosity that aded as she watched stone fences and bare trees float past the van.

"Got the figures from the publisher, Lila. The Sherlock Holmes's ales alone offset any loss we'll take on the Aeschylus. Dammit, I now we could clean up with a translation, but I don't think it's thical to hand the Greek originals over to a pet scholar. This way hey can all do their own translations and argue it out in their urnals. Mrs. Elliot says Earth Two is having loads of fun with the uripides *Ion* we sent them."

"Um hmmn."

"The Missouski reviews were all great and sales are starting to ll. Oh, and you'll like this. Cliff's Notes wants to do *Mercutio*."

The secretary shot her a quick glance, then looked back at the ad. "Too bad they don't have Classic Comics anymore."

Janice had first learned about alternate worlds in a comic book. he still remembered vividly how the Flash vibrated onto a parallel lane where he met another, different Flash. Janice had taken the ames Earth One and Earth Two from that story, and had acknowlged the contribution by listing it as a reference in her initial

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journal report of interdimensional contact. She wondered how many of the scientists reading her article had tried to track down, "Fox, G., Infantino, C., *Flash 123*:9 (1961)."

The worlds that Janice Clark and Janice Clark Elliot occupied were a good deal more similar than the two worlds of the comic book. So far the known differences between Earths One and Two were minor, so minor that the time of separation could not even be approximated, for despite separation, the planes had flowed resolutely onward along the same road, as if in tandem.

Trans Dimensional Imports exploited the minor differences. TDI's main profit came from the sales of popular novels, generally part of a series, novels which had been written on one plane but, due to auctorial death or boredom, were never completed on the other. Interestingly enough, the most frequently requested titles, *Edwin Drood* and *Hornblower in the Crisis*, were incomplete in both alternities. Nor did either continuum have a copy of Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Won*.

The literary curiosities financed more exciting work, as the worlds swapped cultural artifacts—literary treasures that had survived on one world but not on the other. Earth Two had found a cuneiform *Song of Enkidu*; Earth One had the Dead Sea Scrolls. Both had a different set of fragments of the poems of Arichilocos. Exchange of information had also led to greatly enlarged fossil collections, including a nearly complete skeleton of *Australopithecus robustus* and to the location of sunken galleons full of archaeologic treasure and Spanish gold.

The only major discrepancy thus far discovered between worlds was the existence of Lawrence Missouski. He had been utterly unknown on Earth Two until January 7, 1977, when he was standing in the line marked **M-P** in the gymnasium of a junior college, waiting to sign up for a night school class in accounting. A delivery truck had smashed through the wall, injuring two other people and killing Missouski. A reporter on the prowl for human interest material subsequently visited the late Missouski's apartment, where he had discovered a closet full of manuscripts and rejection slips. In the decade since, more doctoral theses had been written about Missouski than about any other American author.

A search of Earth One failed to come up with Lawrence Missouski or any of his relatives. No one had died in the freak accident at the college registration. TDI generally shunned publishing modern authors, whose estates might demand more than the courtesy royalties. They decided to make an exception because of Missouski's critical

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and financial success on Earth Two. One Missouski novel, *The Fall, Divided*, had already been issued, and *A Phoenix in Amber* was on next summer's list.

Janice's colonial ancestor would have been horrified by the changes time and TDI had rung upon his farmhouse. Grandmother Clark, who had dedicated her life to removing the improvements of her Victorian grandmother and to restoring the antique ambience, was also probably doing gymnastics in her grave.

The original sender had been built in Janice's study. That entire wing of the house was now occupied by hardware, composing rooms, and executive offices. A covered walk connected the main building with the stables, now housing staff-facilities and more offices. Janice's living quarters had been gradually pushed back further and further until they wound up out of the house entirely, and in the old smithy.

The house was quiet, swing shift consisting of a minimal crew, when the van pulled into its reserved space. Janice dropped her briefcase and overcoat onto her desk, under the large **To Thine Own Self Be True** sign the staff had given her as a joke. She then went to the sending module in the former study. The view from the french window showed garden, stone and wire fences, and guardhouse. More jokers had placed an ornately embroidered **Know Thyself** above the sending keyboard.

The technician on duty was watching various panels; he acknowledged his employer with an off-handed wave.

"Sending historical documents," he said. "They had a town hall burn down, and some geneological society on Two is paying to bring over the info. Then at 1900 they're sending us another Conan Doyle short. It's amazing how prolific he was when he didn't get into spiritualism."

Janice said, "If there's time between, call me. I'd like to talk with Mrs. E."

She walked to the commissary, past the composition room where typists coded material onto tapes which could be fed over at high speed.

The operation had grown considerably since the days when Janice had sat at the board laboriously sending over *Hornblower and the Hotspur*. For one thing, the new process had cut down on L.T.F., or Lousy Typing Factor. Janice was currently experimenting with sending pictures, broken down into dots and reassembled by computer, similar to the way spacecraft beamed pictures back to earth.

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In the future, TDI might be able to simply photograph pages, and receive pages camera ready for offset printing. So far, though, they'd restricted the photo sending to some Matthew Brady historicals, an exchange of Christmas cards, and a pair of lost silent films. Earth Two had wanted Wegener's second Golem picture, and Earth One had taken Lon Chaney's *London After Midnight* in exchange.

"Ready, Dr. Clark," the public address system said.

She returned to the console, dismissing the tech. He hesitated for a moment, then shrugged, hoping she wouldn't disturb the settings. The fact that she had invented the device did not make him any less uneasy with a woman at the controls. He paced about the room as Janice began typing.

—Hello, Dr. Clark here. Dr. Elliot, please.

—STANDBY hovered on the screen, then disappeared. Janice waited a minute, while the technician on the other world fetched her Earth Two counterpart.

—SHE'LL BE RIGHT HERE.

—Fine. How's the weather?

—CLEAR AND COLD. interlude HELLO JAN, JAN HERE.

—Are you as tired as I am?

—PROBABLY. WE SAW ROB'S LAWYERS ALL AFTERNOON. PHIL AND I GOT VERY NASTY WITH THEM.

—Phil's good, I'm glad we hired both of him.

—POINTED OUT THAT TDI IS RICH ENOUGH TO FIGHT UP TO THE SUPREME COURT. OF COURSE HE KNEW HE COULDN'T GET ALIMONY, OR PAYMENT FOR DISCOVERIES MADE AFTER THE DIVORCE. I JUST FINALLY MADE IT CLEAR I'M BITTER ENOUGH TO FIGHT.

—I guess he thought you'd pay to avoid litigation. Nuisance factor.

—NOT ME. I'M TOUGH NOW. WISH I'D BEEN TOUGH LIKE YOU. I NEVER WOULD HAVE MARRIED HIM. YOU WERE SMART, JAN.

—No, just chicken. I've been thinking. We could send sound films with optical sound tracks.

—GOOD IDEA. NOT MANY LOST FROM THAT PERIOD THOUGH.

—Maybe some are different enough to be worthwhile. Casting changes?

—OK. WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE FLICK?

—Casablanca.

—NICE START. NEVER HEARD OF IT.

—You're kidding. It's a classic.

A brief pause. Janice could see herself, with the slightly different haircut her counterpart wore in the Christmas photo and minus the small scar from last year's horseback fall, yelling out the door for

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a tech to bring her a copy of *Movies for TV*. She mentally paced off the walk to the library, the shelf search, the walk back, the thumb through the alphabetic listings.

—HERE WE ARE. "CASABLANCA." SOUNDS LIKE A TURKEY. ANN SOTHERN, RONALD REAGAN. TWO AND A HALF STARS RATING.

—Incredulous laughter. Ours is four stars at least. Had Bogart and Ingrid Bergman. Reagan? Really? Then we'll want it for sure.

—HE'S GOT A CULT OR SOMETHING?

—He was governor of California. Two terms.

The screen stayed blank.

—Jan?

—THAT WAS STUNNED SILENCE. GOVERNOR?

—Stack of Bibles.

—SAME GUY WHO SOLD BORAX ON "DEATH VALLEY DAYS"?

—Yes. Never elected on Two?

—MADE TV COMEBACK INSTEAD OF POLITICAL CAREER. VOICE OF CHARLIE ON "CHARLIE'S ANGELS."

—Let's exchange Casablancas. We both win. You get a classic, we get a joke.

—SOUNDS GOOD. BREAK NOW. BE UP LATE?

—Usual.

—GOING FOR FRENCH FOOD IN TOWN. I'LL CALL AFTER THE DOYLE. SEE YOU.

—Bon appetit.

She surrendered the console to the hovering technician, who quickly instituted a series of checks, then began gossiping with the other side, probably running postmortems on slightly different Superbowls. It was amazing how friendly you could become with a person in another universe, Janice reflected, especially as the only tangible sign that anyone existed over there was an on-off code. It was even possible, though the odds were a bit against it, that the signals were only random cosmic noise.

Lila came into the study.

"Lila, I've decided what I want on my tombstone. 'Here lies Janice Clark, who turned talking to herself into a fine art, not to mention a multi-million dollar industry.' A little long; needs cutting."

The secretary said, "We've got trouble. Phil's in his office, foaming at the legal briefs."

"Dr. Clark!" The technician bolted out of his chair.

Janice thought, *It never rains . . .*

"Something's haywire."

She switched the console onto record and watched the letters ac-

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cumulate on the screen. "aaaaa aaaaaa aaaaaaa aaaaaaaa aaaaaaaaa a aa aaa . . ."

"Contact! We've got new contact," Janice whooped.

Earth Two broke in with WHAT'S GOING ON?

—Keep the line clear. New universe.

--aaaaaaa aaaaaaaa

"I want you to start sending them the alphabet," she told the technician. "You'll have to use only the **a** key, they don't have an automatic typer yet. Send them 'a is one, b is two, c is three,' and spell out the numbers. Got it? Get to **z** and start over. If it doesn't work, we'll try something new." Something like dragging Jan Elliot home from the French restaurant. Two heads would be better than one.

"What about the story at 1900?"

"Scrub it. If anything comes up, I'll be in my office." She started off down the corridor, chattering at Lila. "I saw a movie once, *Red Planet Mars*, where they established contact with the Martians by sending the number pi. I always wondered how they did the decimal point."

She paused just inside the office door. A wild-eyed, somehow familiar-looking man spun about from the window. "You stole my novel!"

Janice walked to her desk and sat down, still staring at the man. He glared back, hair disarranged, the very picture of righteous anger.

Finally, she turned to the book shelf, got down *The Fall, Divided* and pointed at the author's photograph on the back of the dust jacket. "You?"

"That isn't me! Well, it is, but I don't remember that picture ever being taken. But that's my book. You stole it!"

Phil Bickman, head of the TDI legal staff, came in with an armful of typescript. "It is his. He had the manuscript. It doesn't look like a fake. He has *Phoenix in Amber* too, and we have—had—the only copy of that on Earth One so far. He has two other Missouski's we haven't even received yet, except for the titles. I'm having them coded to send over for confirmation, but I think Mr. Goldberg here is the real McCoy. Or perhaps I should say, the real Missouski."

"Goldberg?"

"Larry Goldberg," the man said, belatedly offering his hand. Phil's cheerful agreement seemed to have made him self-conscious. "I'm a bookkeeper. I write in my spare time. The publishers just send everything back, except the ones who lose the manuscript. Then I

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went into a store and saw you'd published my book under someone else's name . . ." He was getting hysterical again.

"I don't understand it. We did a thorough check. There are no Missouskis. We even checked the Ellis Island records. The family never immigrated."

"Oh, they changed the name."

"What?"

"When they came over from the old country. The immigration man couldn't spell Missouski, so he said, 'From now on you're Goldberg.' So we were."

Janice sat down, feeling the onset of more than just a legal headache. "No wonder we couldn't find any trace of him. The accident . . ."

"You mean the doughnut truck that smashed through the gym that time? Scared me half to death. But I was in the **A** to **G** line; the truck didn't come near me."

Janice had had enough. *Kill him with kindness*, she thought. She stood up, hands flat on the desk. "Then I'd say you were a very lucky man, Mr. Goldberg. On Earth Two it didn't just scare you. There you're a famous author, a household name, renowned by the critics, loved by college students and little kiddies. And very, very dead.

"Now here on Earth One you're healthy, you've got a decent job, and you're on the threshold of success. Because of us. Remember, you couldn't give this stuff away, Goldberg; but we published it. Now you can get the rest of your works published, and you can speak at universities, flack your latest on 'The Tonight Show,' dance at Studio 54, and win lots of Pulitzers. Have a seat."

He sat, mouth open.

"We are sorry that your book got printed under Missouski's name, but it was a totally honest misadventure. Here's what we'll do to make it up to you. Larry. *The Fall, Divided* has already been published; we'll give you our standard heir's royalties. They aren't much. Future editions will have your name on the title page. It's been sold to Hollywood for $500,000; you can have that, minus a 20% agenting fee we'll keep. You can sell the other books for yourself, and with Phil working with you, I can guarantee outrageous sums for every one of them. In other words, TDI will be glad to act as your agent, again for standard fees. Have I left anything out?"

"No," he gulped.

"Fine. Phil, why don't you get Larry something to drink and work out the details. Lila, you liked Missouski's books, didn't you? See if you can give Phil a hand, OK?"

They straggled out, Goldberg pausing at the door. "Uh, thanks,"

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he said.

Alone, Janice leaned back as far as the chair allowed, put her feet up on the desk, and laughed hysterically. She never could have pulled this off in her youth. People used to walk all over her—naturally, they'd walked all over Jan Elliot as well. It was only since the two had "met," and begun talking every day, that she had developed this backbone. Between giggles, Janice said, "Anything's possible when you know someone who understands everything you do, and still likes you."

"The way I understand you," answered a voice from the outer office.

She shuddered with remembrance, and swung her feet back onto the rug. "Rob Elliot?"

He smiled, standing in the doorway. She hadn't seen him for—was it eight years? She had felt then that she couldn't survive eight hours without him, let alone eight days. . . .

"Still talk to yourself, eh? No one was in reception," he said. "It's wonderful to see you again, Janny. I think about you often."

"Oh? I don't think of you. I used to dream occasionally. About that trip we took to Long Beach; the nightmare is me trying to get a plane home. But I haven't had one of those dreams for at least five years." She marvelled at how callous she sounded. Time was when just seeing his name in the classical lit. section of a bookstore could make her eyes fill with tears.

He turned his smile up one notch. "That's all past. Can't we meet as old friends, people who used to mean a lot to each other?"

She admired the little tremble he put into his voice. He'd always been able to twist her to his slightest whim. Jan's horror stories on their married life on Two had frequently hinged on that ability.

Janice remembered a bar session, sometime during graduate school, with a much-married friend describing her second husband's iniquities. "We're intelligent—hell—brilliant women," Janice had cried, not used to Scotch and soda on an empty stomach. "Are we masochists or something? Why do we keep falling in love with soulless bastards?"

Her friend had stared at her with the wisdom of three Bloody Marys. "Because nice men are so damn dull," she'd answered.

"You look the same as ever," Rob said. "Still chewing your fingernails."

He looked older, though Janice decided not to mention it. He'd

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been the vainest man she'd ever known, the kind who checked every shiny surface for his reflection. She wondered if the beard and sporty clothes helped his self-esteem. He took a seat and began filling her in on the lives of people she hadn't seen, nor particularly wanted to see, since college.

Finally she said, "You didn't come all this way for gossip," then waited. It was obvious that he wanted something. He had no legal angle to play, as did the Robert Elliot of Earth Two, suing Janice for her post-divorce explosion of wealth. Here on Earth One, Janice had not married him, realizing in the nick of time that she would only be trading single misery for wedded misery, and had excised him from her life. It had not made her any happier than the Janice on Two, but it was comforting to know she hadn't made a wrong decision. Life had been little fun either way it was played.

"I hear this other world of yours has a Sophocles play we don't have."

"*Theseus*. Found during the war in a jar in a cave. On our earth the cave was demolished. A minor, early work, though the scene with Ariadne before Theseus strands her on the island is supposed to be powerful." Rob was almost salivating at the tidbit of plot. Janice continued, "Dionysus comes across as a rational good Samaritan, more Athenian than Theseus. I suppose you'd like the original, so you can do a translation? Get the jump on all the others, maybe even do a sole authorized edition?"

He was nodding eagerly.

"Well, sorry, Rob, but that's not TDI policy, and I can't see making exceptions, even for an old dear friend." She rose, began ushering him to the door.

He said, "Now who's the soulless bastard?"

She gave him a tight-lipped smile. "It's amazing what you can do when you have the moral strength of two."

She escorted Rob to the gate, then looked in on Phil. He had preliminary contracts already drawn up and had dragged in half the legal staff to look for loopholes. They were brewing coffee and preparing for an all-nighter. Lila was feeding compliments to Goldberg, and he was swallowing them like a starved man.

"From literary obscurity to literary lion in one evening. God's in his heavens, all's right with the worlds," Janice thought, and wandered over to the sending module. It was about time for the other Jan's call.

"The new guy understood our message," the technician told her. "I gave him the alphabet three times, then he send back '15 11,' you

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know, OK. That's the last he said."

—JANICE ELLIOT HERE. JAN?

"Take a coffee break." —I'm here. Heard the news?

—WE LISTENED IN. EARTH THREE?

—That had supervillains, didn't it? Let's call it Earth-C.

—OK. OH, TRY CHEZ ARMAND, THE FOOD'S IMPROVED.

—One moment.

She dialed the legal room, and told Lila to take Goldberg to the French restaurant in town, and to order the imported wine.

—Guess who came to visit.

—HIMSELF? MONEY?

—Sophocles' rights.

—I WANT TO HEAR ALL ABOUT IT. EVERY GRISLY DETAIL.

—First, we found Missouski, or he found us. Named Goldberg here. I think I talked him out of suing. No more modern authors!

—JUST CLASSICS FROM NOW ON.

--hello

—Hey, it's Earth Three!

—I THOUGHT YOU WANTED TO CALL IT EARTH-C.

--are you making flash jokes questionmark

—THEY'VE READ FLASH!

—Who are you?

--just call me the wizard of earth c comma i am janice clark elliot

—Naturally. I'm Jan Clark.

—JAN ELLIOT. YOU MARRIED ROB TOO?

--the rat period no exclamation point we are separated

—YOU'RE NOT DIVORCED YET? JAN, YOU'RE IN FOR REAL HEADACHES.

—But don't worry, we can recommend a good lawyer.

--are you trying to say i am going to earn megabucks and dear rob will try to extract them questionmark

—Damned right. You're going to become a big publisher of unwritten books. Did your C.S. Forester finish *Hornblower in the Crisis*?

--yes, i think so oh i understand period do you have the ending of edwin drood questionmark

—NO. BUT SOONER OR LATER, ONE OF US IS BOUND TO.

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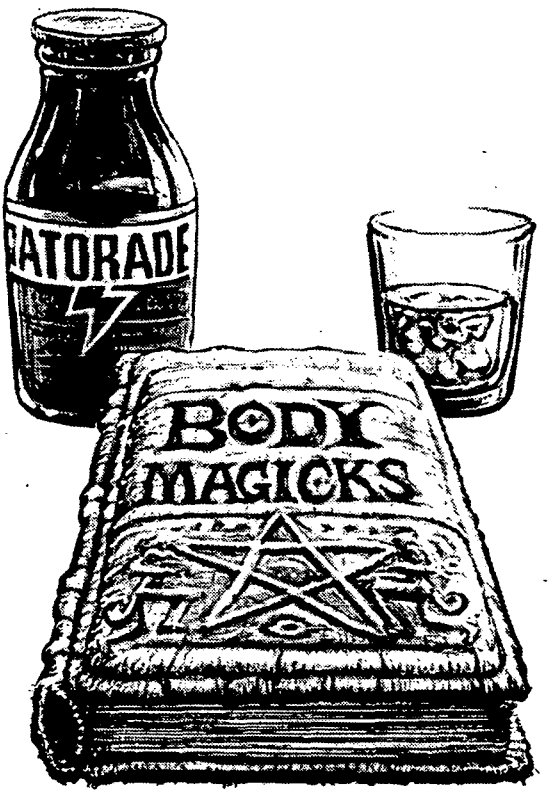
ENDURANCE VILE

by Steven Barnes

art: Karl B. Kofoed



The author reports being 27, unmarried, and a lover of plants, animals, and some things that haven't made up their minds yet. Major interests are writing and the general field of human mental and physical development. This will be the author's fourth published story. Other projects include a novel, Dream Park Murder, *a collaboration with Larry Niven.*

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I was the last customer in Owensville Health Foods, and Albert Owens rang up my order with one eye on the clock. He was just beginning to get those "It's time to close shop" yawns he is famous for, when The Runner walked into the store. Walked, not ran, which was a surprise in itself. Owens lifted his shaggy brows to the heavens in supplication. "So much for going home early," he growled in my ear. Owens has an impressive growl, too. In fact, everything about the man is impressive: over fifty years old, and he still has the broad shoulders and firm arms of the halfback he was in college.

"What?" I asked in mock-surprise, "and miss the chance to concoct an Owsly Special? Shame *shame* that such a thought should cross your mind. Just look at that poor lost soul . . . " I pointed surreptitiously at The Runner, as all of Owensville's customers called the little man. This month. Two months ago he had been The Yogi, and before that, The Bodybuilder. He was a male secretary named Owsly Bostic with a penchant for changing obsessions every fortnight or so, and the bad judgement to fill every available ear with his latest health theories. The last time I had seen him, he wore dirty sneakers and raveled white jogging shorts; and his stringily muscular legs were flecked in mud. His jersey smelled as if a platoon of Marines had taken a spongebath with it.

The Runner was about thirty-five, perennially going on eighteen. He was always "almost back in shape," filling his stomach with nostrums purchased by the armload from Albert's shelves and punishing his body with a series of brutal exercise regimes. I reflected that this was, after all, America; and everyone had a right to go to hell in the handbasket of their choosing. But did Free Speech guarantee a man the right to yell "botulism!" in a crowded cafeteria?

"Carrot juice Special," he said to Suzie, the USC student who tends the health bar at nights. She looked at him for an instant as if she didn't recognise him, then began to fix the drink. I could understand her confusion. It was the first time I had seen Owsly out of jockstrap, so to speak. He wore slacks and a knit shirt, and not a trace of a terrycloth headband or other athletic paraphernalia. His usual locker-room aroma could, in Albert's picturesque phrase, "wilt wheat germ"; but he seemed to be freshly cleaned and polished. Amend that: there was a small white bandage on his forehead.

"Boy, he sure seems quiet tonight," I grinned at Albert.

Owens returned my grin with a twist of lemon. "Listen, Steve, you haven't had to sit through as many of his lectures about isometrics, or vegetarianism, or colonic irrigation, or sufi dancing, as I have. I'm counting my blessings." He ran a hand over his thick

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mop of black hair, and I found myself wondering when he'd start showing age like normal human beings.

"Oh, well," I countered, "at least it's only one new kick at a time."

"Yeah, there's that."

I looked in my bag at the vitamins and kefir I had stopped in to buy, and was about to say goodnight and goodluck, when Owlsy looked up from his "Special": carrot juice with brewers' yeast and desiccated liver powder (I remember the night when, in a garrulous mood, Bostic had insisted that I try a swig; I remember a stray thought concerning maggot milkshakes running through my mind as I downed it), and said, "I'm giving it up. Swear on my mother's grave."

"Giving what up?" Suzie asked, uninterested. She was a redhead on the pretty side of plain, with a history-major's mind in a cheerleader's body. I sometimes thought the combination was awkward, then remembered that that equation could have been reversed and remained silent.

"The running. I've—gone too far. I know something I should never have found out."

I nudged Owens. "A door Man was never meant to open, and so forth." Owens sighed and looked at the clock again.

"If I let him start, I won't be out of here until midnight."

"Then don't let him start."

Owens's expression was one of whimsical resignation. "Oh, why the hell not?" He walked up to the front door quickly and pulled the shade. Only the four of us were left inside, now.

We gathered around Bostic, who was still gazing into his carrot juice. "Well?" I asked finally. "Why are you giving it up?"

I searched my writer's mind for a proper description of his eyes. Frightened? No, "haunted" was closer.

"It all started two years ago. You all remember what I looked like then?" Indeed we did. He was a quiet, plump man with thinning brown hair and a petulant mouth who came and went often, saying little to anyone. He read the *Slender Age* magazines on the rack and tanked up on lecithin-kelp-B6-cider-vinegar tablets this week, expanding cellulose tablets the next, or anything else that promised fast, fast, *fast* relief from rotundity. But he never lost weight, until . . .

"Yeah, well, I went from diet to diet, and never seemed to get anywhere. Finally I read somewhere that diets don't work, because the expression 'going on a diet' always implies that one day you will go *off* of the diet, too. What I had to change, it said, was my whole

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self-image. If I thought like a skinny person, it would be easier to be one." I nodded my head. Made sense to me, but Owens sat with his lips pursed as if waiting for a punch line.

"So I tried to think: what is a skinny person like? Or better, a *healthy* person? And I kept thinking about that; and I got into analysis, and self-hypnotism; and pretty soon I was finding out things about myself I'd never known before. I was dealing with stress with celery sticks instead of sausage, and the weight was creeping off. But then I wanted more, and I began exercising."

Suzie wiped the counter lazily with her cloth as she reminisced. "Was that the day you came in and bought all of the Jack La Lanne books?"

He nodded vigorous agreement. "Calisthenics. Then weights. Then yoga, and finally running. I had found it at last. Running is a *skinny-people's* sport, no two ways about it. And I got into it. At first I could puff out a half-mile. Then a mile. Then two miles and finally three. I tried everything I could, but couldn't get above three without getting sick to my stomach. I just couldn't. So I started researching and improving my diet, and by then I had lost thirty pouunds and *was* a skinny person, but it wasn't enough. Well, I finally squeezed my way up to five miles, but it took months to do, and I was just about to my limit. But wow! I could run five miles in forty minutes, and I was *happy*."

He chewed on his lower lip miserably, as if musing over the wisdom of continuing. "I'm going to need another Special if I'm going to finish this," he said.

Owsly nodded to Suzie; and, careful to breathe only through her mouth, she whipped it up and held it out to him. He downed half of it in two glugs, and I felt a fish flopping in my stomach.

He licked a brownish-orange mustache off his upper lip and continued: "One day I was browsing through one of those little metaphysical bookshops off Hollywood Boulevard and Wilcox, and I came across an old, yellowed book called *Body Magicks*. I browsed through it, and was stunned. It claimed to be an exercise manual for accomplished sorcerers and warlocks. I laughed at the time, but the book cautioned over and over against the use of these techniques by the 'uninitiated.' I bought it, and the old man at the cash register made some sort of finger sign at me; and when I didn't return it, he almost refused to sell me the book. I talked him into it finally, but he cautioned me against using the knowledge in the book.

"I took it home, fascinated and amused. Of course the warnings were absurd. Of course."

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"What did it say?" Owen asked, curious at last.

"It said that all fatigue was caused by the lack of proper breathing habits. That poisons build up in the bloodstream that must be cleansed by the 'airfire.' If you don't breathe properly, the muscles will clog with poisons and stop moving."

Owens glanced at me in unspoken question. "That's a pretty fair description of the Kreb cycle," I mused aloud.

"Kreb cycle?"

"Sure," I said. "Your muscles are fueled by a chemical called ATP, adenosine triphosphate. Exertion causes one of the phosphate bonds to break, releasing energy."

"What does that have to do with breathing?" Suzie asked.

"Plenty. If you get oxygen faster than the ATP chains break down, you have an *aerobic* exercise, like distance running. If you break down the chains faster than oxygen gets in to the muscles, you have an *anaerobic* exercise, like—oh—sprinting or power lifting. But lactic acid builds up in the muscles due to oxygen debt during anaerobic exercise, and if enough of it builds up the muscles don't get the message to twitch anymore, and activity stops. Oxygen re-forms the ATP bonds, so breathing is very important." I searched my memory, and came up close to empty. "Almost every Eastern meditation or martial art has its own special breathing patterns. They all work."

"Yeah, you've got it right," Owsly said, glad to have me pick up the pieces of his explanation. "They all work, but this one . . . " He shook his head, and a chill seemed to go through him as he sat quietly. Another pull on his drink, and he was ready to go on. "I can't say if this technique would work for anyone else. I don't know if I was a fluke or what. You decide for yourselves. I started using the meditations suggested. I fasted, I sniffed salt water up each nostril to clean my air passages, and I breathed.

"Lord, I never knew what breathing was until I got into that book. Breathing to the tips of my lungs. Breaths inhaled for ten beats, held for six, exhaled for twelve. That was the crucial thing, the proportion of inhalation to retention to exhalation. That, and the number of breaths per minute compared to the number of heartbeats. I don't want to go into it too far right now. You decide for yourselves if you want to.

"I began to feel—different. Lighter. As if I weren't really breathing, as if my body were part of a—a cosmic flow that moved the air in and out of my body all of its own volition. My breathing slowed and slowed and deepened, and soon I forgot where I was. I don't know how long I stayed in trance, but it felt as if I could see myself

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sitting there. As if I were no longer in my body, that its lungs were breathing, its heart beating, and all of its functions taking place without *me* in it to guide. Then I laughed. Of *course* my body could get along perfectly well without my conscious mind. Lord knows I never told my organs how to operate, or my heart how to pump. They operated perfectly well without me, without my conscious meddling. And then I understood what the book was trying to say. The body needs only to be pointed in the right direction, then get your brain out of gear and let it go. I was ecstatic. I had found the *way*!"

None of us interrupted Owsly as he drained his glass, and there was a terrible secret stirring in the depths of his bloodshot eyes. "What I didn't notice was that I had trouble re-entering my body. It was like trying to engage gears that were moving at different speeds, and neither wanting to yield. I was giddy and dizzy when I finally made it, but too exuberant to see the implications. . . .

"The next day was Saturday, and I knew that the track at the local high school would be closed. That would be perfect, since I didn't want to be disturbed. I climbed the fence and walked out to the center of the field, sat down in a half-lotus, and closed my eyes. My breathing slowed, until the proportions were down to . . . to where they needed to be." He looked at Suzie with a nervous apology on his lips and a look that said *can't you see I'm just trying to protect you?* "After a time, I got up and stretched, still maintaining the same breathing pattern. Then I started to run.

"I ran so slowly it was almost a walk, because I had to do all of my inhalations through my nose, and that limited my speed a lot. If I sped up too quickly, I'd go into . . . oxygen debt, that's it, oxygen debt, and have to slow down again. Slowly, the rhythm caught, and I was able to pick up a little speed and some smoothness in my movement. And I began to sink deeper and deeper into the lure of the breathing. Every quarter-mile lap I got deeper and deeper into it, so that by the fifth lap, I was beginning to pull away from my body. I could 'see' myself running, but I couldn't feel the exertion. There was no hesitation in my movement, and my muscles weren't fighting themselves. I began to pick up speed.

"It was marvelous. Soon I was whipping around the track at close to top speed, only I was doing it for lap after lap after lap, without fatigue! I 'watched' myself, knowing that if I could only surrender to the deeper rhythms, that still more wonderful achievements could be mine. So I concentrated, and widened the gap between my body and my mind, so that I was drifting off alone in a black void, while

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my body moved endlessly around the track.

"At last I noticed that the sun was going down. Why, I must have run eight miles! And without a stumble or single painful moment. I figured that it was time to end the experiment."

He looked at Owen with a face whose muscles had gone the way of warm butter. "I don't know if you will believe this, but I *couldn't* stop. I couldn't regain control of my body. The gears just wouldn't mesh. I tried. . . . Lord, how I tried; it was as if I just didn't belong in there anymore, that my body preferred running, sweaty and glassy-eyed, around the track. And it was speeding up. The heartbeat was the same, and the breathing was the same, but there was no mistaking the fact that I—or it—was beginning to move at an absurd speed. Maybe that speed was believable for a sprint, but over a distance of *miles*—well, I was starting to panic. Again I tried to get back into my body, and it wouldn't let me.

"And now I knew why the book had cautioned me. All my life my conscious mind had denied my body exercise, had stuffed it with garbage foods, poured dope smoke and alcohol and God knows what else into it; and now it wasn't letting me back in. It considered me a bad influence.

"Well, I may have been dumb; but I'm still all the brains my body has; and it clearly didn't know what to do without me. I mean, it kept running until the perspiration stopped running from my pores and until I was staggering and my limbs were shaking and still it didn't stop. I knew it—I was going to die if I didn't do something quick.

"I tried again to gain control over my legs, but it was hopeless; they just plodded on and on. I tried to move my hands, and they twitched a little, but when I tried to force them to grab onto a drinking fountain or fence, they wouldn't move more than a few inches, and I almost gave up.

"Then I remembered my eyelids. I focused all my willpower on them, and finally they shut. My body stumbled on in total darkness for a lap or so, then ran off of the track and smack into a wall.

"When I woke up, it was daylight. I was so tired I couldn't feel anything, and my feet were a swollen mess, but somehow I managed to get home. I swear I must have run all night." He sighed with the drooping shoulders of one whose story is finished, and trickled out his few remaining words. "I missed a day of work, but I was happy just to be alive. Anyway. That's why I'm giving up running."

Owen and I winked at each other as Owsly slid off his stool and slunked down a couple of bucks and change for the drinks. Owen

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waved him off. "On the house, Owsly. What you've just got to learn is that you get too wrapped up in your activities. You just overdo."

"Yeah," he said wearily, "I guess you're right. That's why I'm giving this—" He pulled a tattered copy of a book out of his pocket and laid it on the counter. "—to you. I hope you use it more wisely than I did." And shaking his head sadly, Owsly walked out of the store, Owens locking the door behind him.

The three of us, Owens, Suzie, and myself, looked at the book for a long time before Suzie, bless her fearless little heart, turned it over. Sure enough, the cover read *Body Magicks*. I thumbed through it for a moment, and Suzie whistled under her breath.

"Well, Owen . . . " I said, laying it down gingerly, "are you game?"

He looked at it with dreadful curiosity, then shook his head. "Not me. I'm an old man, dammit." He said this while trying to poke out his gut and relax his arms into flabbiness. "What about you . . . ?"

I started to be brave, but shook a negative. "Naw. I'm too far behind in my reading to check this out. I guess it'll just have to wait. . . ."

But Suzie's hand had already snaked out and snagged it. "I'll give it a read," she said thoughtfully.

"Whatever for?" Owens said, curious. "You're not into any sport."

"True enough," she said, gathering her sweater and turning off the lights behind the juicebar. "But I've got a heavy date with the captain of the tennis team Friday night; and . . . well, you never know, do you?"

Politely, she affected not to notice our lowered jaws as she skipped to the front door and vanished, the tattered copy of *Body Magicks* tucked firmly under her left arm.

ANSWERS TO THE QUEER STORY OF GARDNER'S MAGAZINE (from page 37)

1. If you add the digits of any number, then add the digits of the sum, and continue in this way until one digit remains, that digit is called the "digital root" of the original number. The year 2556 has a digital root of 9, and of course scrambling digits cannot change a digital root.

A curious property of any number with digital root 9 is that all its multiples are digital root 9. Adding 100 (digital root 1) to the multiple produces a number with digital root 1. The digital root of

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any number is the same as the remainder when that number is divided by 9 (with the exception of numbers that are digital root 9, in which cases there is no remainder).

When your final result is divided by 9 there will be a remainder of 1; and since 3 goes evenly into 9, the remainder will also be 1 when the number is divided by 3. Therefore the quotient will have a fraction of 1/3. In your calculator's readout this will appear as the repeating decimal fraction .33333 . . . .

2.
$$\begin{array}{r} 963 \\ 852 \\ 741 \\ \hline 2556 \end{array}$$

The solution comes quickly, and is easily seen to be unique, if you start by analyzing the columns from left to right.

3. $1 - 2 + 3 + 4 + 567 - 8 - 9 = 556$

4. $123 - 45 + 67 - 89 = 56$

5. The best I could do is: $(4! \div .4) - 4 = 56$

6. If numbers are placed at the left of each row and above each column as shown below, you will see that every cell contains the sum of the pair of numbers that mark its row and column. Every selection of a cell number eliminates just one pair of the "generator" numbers. Since the ten generators add to 56, it follows that the five circled numbers must also add to 56.

	2	4	5	1	3
8	10	12	13	9	11
7	9	11	12	8	10
11	13	15	16	12	14
9	11	13	14	10	12
6	8	10	11	7	9

For more details on how to construct these mystifying magic squares (they can be based on multiplication as well as addition) see Chapter 2 of my first collection of columns: *The Scientific American Book of Mathematical Puzzles and Diversions.*

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THE SF CONVENTIONAL CALENDAR
by Erwin S. Strauss

This is the time of year to pick an SF con(vention) to attend to prepare for the WorldCon in Boston. Get out for a social weekend with your favorite SF authors, editors, artists, and fellow fans. For a longer, later list, and a sample of SF folksongs, send me an addressed stamped envelope at 9850 Fairfax Sq. #232, Fairfax VA 22031. The Hot Line is (703) 273-6111. If my machine answers, leave your area code and number CLEARLY, and I'll call you back. When writing cons, enclose an SASE. When calling them, give your name and reason for calling right away. Look for me at cons as Filthy Pierre.

ParaCon. For info, write: **c/o Casto, 425 Waupelani Dr. #24, State College PA 16801.** Or phone: **(814) 237-5262** (10 AM to 10PM only, not collect). Con will be held in: State College PA (if location omitted, same as the address) on: 1-3 Aug., 1980. Guests will include: C. L. Grant, Richard Frank, Kelly Freas. At the Sheraton Penn State Inn.

RiverCon, (502) 636-5340. Louisville KY, Aug. 1-3. Roger Zelazny, Vincent DiFate. At the Galt House Hotel. Featuring a riverboat cruise Sunday afternoon, & Saturday masquerade.

AugusTrek, (301) 577-0581. Washington DC, Aug. 1-3. Roddenberry phone call, amateur hour. Filling in while August Party, that most fannish of Star Trek cons, takes a sabbatical.

MichiCon, (313) 234-4062. Flint MI, Aug. 15-17. Delany, Sturgeon, B. Vallejo, A. D. Foster.

BuboniCon, c/o ASFS, 429 Graceland SE, Albuquerque NM 87108. 22-24 Aug. C. J. Cherryh. A handy stopover if you're driving to NorEasCon. Always lots of old-time SF people there.

ASFiCon, c/o ASFiC, 6045 Summit Wood Dr., Kenesaw GA 30144. 22-24 Aug. Ted (Heavy Metal) White, Mike Glyer, Mike Bishop. The 1980 DeepSouthCon. A traditional WorldCon warmup.

NorEasCon II, Box 46, MIT PO, Boston MA 02139. 29 Aug-1 Sept. Damon Knight, Kate Wilhelm, Robert Silverberg, Bruce Pelz. The 1980 WorldCon. Sheraton Boston. Join at the door only.

BeneluxCon, c/o Vernon Brown, U. of Aston, Dept. of Pharmacy, Gosta Green, Birmingham B4 74E, UK. Ghent, Belgium, 5-8 Sep. The 7th annual edition of this major European con.

MosCon, c/o Finkbiner, Box 9141, Moscow ID 83843. 12-14 Sep. G. Barr, F. Denton, J. Sohl.

OtherCon, c/o Knudson, Box 3933, Aggieland Sta. TX 77844. College Station TX. 12-14 Sep.

Intervention, Box 151366, Salt Lake City UT 84115. (801) 355-8076. 26-28 Sep. Bradley.

RoVaCon, Box 117, Salem VA 24153. (703) 389-9400. Roanoke VA, 10-11 Oct. Fred Pohl, Kelly Freas, Elizabeth Taylor Warner, Paul Dellinger. Mrs. Warner will present scholarships.

OctoCon, c/o Spellbinders, Box 1824, Santa Rosa CA 95402. 11-12 Oct. Major new Western con.

World Fantasy Con, c/o Chuck Miller, 239 N. 4th St., Columbia PA 17512. Baltimore MD, 31 Oct.-2 Nov. The fantasy fan's WorldCon, at the beautiful Hunt Valley Inn, north of the city of Poe.

PhilCon, c/o Lawler 2750 Narcissa Rd., Plymouth Meeting PA 19462. Philadelphia PA, 14-16 Nov. Bova, Freas, Sheckley. The oldest SF con, back in downtown Philly where it belongs.

Darkover Grand Council Meeting, c/o Armida Council, Box 7501, Newark DE 19711. Wilmington DE, 28-30 Nov., 1980. Katherine Kurtz, Marion Zimmer Bradley, C. J. Cherryh, N. Springer.

WesterCon 34, Box 161719, Sacramento CA 95816. Held over the July 4th weekend in 1981.

Denvention II, Box 11545, Denver CO 80211. 3-7 Sep., 1981. C. L. Moore, Clifford Simak, Rusty Hevelin, Ed Bryant. The 1981 WorldCon. It's not too early to start planning vacations.

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ON STAR TREK AS LITURGY
by Andrew M. Greeley

Father Greeley is a professor of sociology at the University of Arizona, a study director at the National Opinion Research Center and a nationally syndicated columnist. His first novel, an heroic fantasy about medieval Ireland called The Magic Cup, *is just out from McGraw-Hill.*

This essay and the one following, by Bill Warren, approach the same general topic from different points of view. We hope to present more such contrasting pairs of essays in the near future.

"Liturgy"—public ceremonial enactment of fundamental themes explaining the meaning of life.

Most SF enthusiasts will, I think, be offended and baffled by the success of *Star Trek: the Motion Picture*. They will argue that it is not SF at all, but something else masquerading in SF garb. They will lament the enormous amount of money expended on what, to their minds, is a burlesque of authentic SF. They will complain that if Hollywood were willing to put even a fraction of the *Star Trek* money into real SF, it might produce a major artistic success.

Yet, if the American public is willing to spend sixty million dollars to see *Star Trek: the Motion Picture* within a couple of weeks of its release, the film must respond to something powerful in the human personality. It is surely not a shoot-'em-up adventure farce like *Star Wars* nor an appeal to the exciting possibility "that we are not alone" like *Close Encounters*.

One may easily dismiss its popularity as evidence of the tastelessness of the American masses. Yet, such a dismissal, in addition to being snobbish, misses something important about the *Star Trek* myth. In the city of Tucson where I write this article one can see at 6:00 every evening a different *Star Trek* repeat. In less than four months the whole repertory is exhausted. It does not matter. There are still enough enthusiastic fans for the series to be repeated year

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after year. Nor are all the "Trekkies" tasteless adolescents (as some of the film critics seem to argue). Some are even university faculty members whose taste in other matters is impeccable. The university book store has an entire set of shelves devoted to *Star Trek* books, each a celebration of the basic unchanging formula. The appeal of *Star Trek* is not comprehended when one writes it off as bowlderized SF.

I propose to argue in this review that *Star Trek* is a *liturgical story*, a modern morality play rooted in liturgy as were the medieval morality plays. Indeed, it is one of the few liturgical stories available to the modern consumer of narratives. The habitual reader of this magazine may not find liturgical stories attractive. That is a matter of his taste. I do not hope to change that. I hope, rather, to persuade him why many people do find it attractive. I suggest that to evaluate *Star Trek* by the standards of SF is to confuse literary genres. SF, "space adventure," and "morality stories," I submit, are all different literary genres, part of a broader literary family which I will call "science fiction." Both the small first letters and the quotation marks are used with deliberate intent. The reader of this magazine almost certainly enjoys the first genre. He may not like the other two at all (I enjoy all three for different reasons). I will not ask him to like them. I will ask him, however, to try to understand why some of us do enjoy the latter two genres, even if the reader is convinced that such enjoyment is inferior.

A writer must be permitted his own definitions so that he may be able to express his thought precisely. I do not insist that anyone else accept my definition as his/her definition. I merely ask that he permit me to use my definition, so I can communicate my ideas. I define SF as a genre under the "family" of narratives I call "science ficton." SF may mean science fiction, or it may, as some observers now insist, more appropriately stand for speculative fiction. SF is "premise narrative." It probably also includes the fantasy narratives which increasingly appear side by side with classic science fiction in journals like this one. "Science fiction" is a broader category of narratives including SF, space adventure, and other story genres that are characterized, loosely speaking, by some of the following: travel in space, contact with alien creatures, time twists, future settings, scientific or pseudo scientific equipment, and modified social organizational structures and ethical perspectives.

I shall illustrate this thesis with three films: *The Lathe of Heaven*, a public TV version of Ursula Le Guin's novel; *The Black Hole*; and *Star Trek*. The first, I contend, is SF (science fiction *strictu sensu*).

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The second is space adventure, and the third is the rare narrative form of morality play or liturgical story.

All three deal with the future; all three have "special effects" (in *Lathe of Heaven*, obviously low budget effects); two of the three involve contact with aliens. All have some kind of scientific atmosphere or climate (REM dream study, black holes, warp drive), all are set in the future, all portray modified social organizational arrangements, and all three make intensely moral points (the morality play is not distinguished from the other two genres by having a monopoly on moral concern, despite its label).

Hence, all are clearly "science fiction" (*lato sensu*). Yet, all belong in different literary genres. *Lathe of Heaven* is a story the like of which one might read in this magazine. It is "premise" narrative. The author establishes a plausible, though unusual premise—in this case that a man's dreams are able to modify the reality of the non-dream world. Then, she (in this case) develops a story in which the action occurs in strict accord with the premise and unfolds (partially at least) under the impulse contained in the dynamics of the premise. "What would/might it be like if" is the guiding rubric of SF. In the case of *Lathe of Heaven* Mrs. Le Guin brilliantly elaborates a story of what might happen if a person's dreams could really affect the world outside of his preconscious imagination. The pleasure of such a story lies (mainly) in watching the skilled and disciplined imagination of the author develop a world which is utterly consistent with the "as if" premise and then create a plot in which her/his hero/heroine must conflict with the situations which the premise generates. In *Lathe of Heaven* the leading character is caught in a conflict generated by the discovery that if one arrogantly messes with the course of human events by one's power of dreaming reality, one makes a bad situation even worse.

For those whose tastes run in the direction of such intellectualized and highly disciplined exercises of the creative imagination, premise narratives can have an enormous appeal, especially in the hands of a skilled mistress of the art such as Mrs. Le Guin. Hence, the crowded SF racks in paper-back stores and the success of an increasing number of journals like this one. Not every one's tastes find this genre so compelling, however. *Lathe of Heaven*, consequently, is a low-budget, public-TV film, as opposed to high-budget, network efforts like *Battlestar Galactica* or *Buck Rogers*.

Such films, I contend, are part of another genre which for want of a better name I call space adventures. I might almost call them space westerns. I suggest that *Star Wars* and *Black Hole* fit neatly

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in this second genre. Note the "western" bar scene in *Star Wars* and the significant "western" name of the explorer craft in *Black Hole*—the *Palomino*. Such stories are essentially adventure yarns in which good (white hat) fights evil (black hat) [Maximilian Schell] with six guns or a variant thereof (the shoot-out with lasers between the two bands of robots in *Black Hole*). In these stories the scientific/space/future setting is merely a backdrop for a romantic adventure of the sort Robert Louis Stevenson might write (*Kidnapped, The Master of Ballantrae*, for example; although *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is close to premise SF).

The appeal of the adventure yarn is broad, if not universal. The stories may be shallow and superficial, there may be no great character development, the moral point may be trivial, but the action . . . ah, the action! *Star Wars* worked because the creators put in it almost every variety of adventure action which the motion-picture industry has produced. One reveled in action, luxuriated in it, wallowed in it. Consistent premises? There weren't any. But the film was quite deliberately placed in a genre which by definition did not require them (I suppose that finally *Close Encounters* belongs in the same genre, although it has certain unusual traits for a pure adventure story).

Finally, we come to liturgical narratives or morality plays. Despite their titles, such narratives are concerned less with ethical issues than with religious questions—overriding problems about the meaning of the universe, the meaning of human life, the most fundamental principles of human relationships. The cast of characters is more or less given; the audience knows their personalities and their perspectives, understands the conflicts which will emerge between and among them, can even anticipate the conclusions. Yet, the narrative is never dull because the meaningful dilemmas with which the characters struggle, basically simple in theory, are endlessly complex in the practice of daily life. We no more tire of the debates among the characters than we tire of the debates in Plato's various dialogues, even though the position of Socrates and his various friends is always totally predictable as is the outcome (Socrates always wins, just like Jim Kirk).

We sociologists define religion as the set of symbols which provides ultimate meaning for human existence. In morality plays the symbols are incarnated as characters and interact with one another in perennial debates which are ever ancient and ever new because they can never finally be resolved.

Morality plays went out of fashion after they became so stylized

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as to turn moralistic and dull. Religion, however, need not be dull. It deals with the most poignant and fundamental problems about which humans can ponder. A morality play in the hands of a skillful author can be compelling precisely because the issues involved are so compelling. One knows the answer which will be given, but one is still fascinated by the interplay of characters which represents the interplay, ritualized and liturgicized, of various aspects of one's own personality.

Morality plays are liturgical, it seems to me, for three reasons: 1) The original plays were once part of the sacred liturgy and then moved out into the courtyard in front of the cathedral, though they were still connected with the great liturgical feasts (the *Play of Daniel* is, perhaps, the one most of us are likely to know). 2) They deal in obvious and explicit symbolism with fundamental religious questions. 3) The action is stylized and ritualistic as is liturgical performance.

I contend that *Star Trek* belongs in this genre (and from correspondence with Gene Roddenberry I gather that he intended it to belong in this genre). The settings may be science/space/future. The action is liturgical. Jim Kirk is Everyman. Bones is the Humanist. Spock is the Rational–Man/Priest. Uruhu is the Mother (Mary the Mother?), Scotty is the Technos. Janice, the blond Yeoman, is the Bride. Sulu and Chekov are the Good Barbarians. The Klingons are the Savage Barbarians. The Romulans are the Old Pagans. The *Enterprise* (and that title, the proudest name in American naval history, was a stroke of genius) is Earth. Its voyage (Pilgrimage) is our journey through life.

The issues the crew faces are utterly simple and perennial—as well as perennially poignant. The resolutions are almost always the same. In the film the resolution is the totally unoriginal, but also profoundly disturbing and challenging insight that a single tender act of human affection has greater power than (quite literally) all the knowledge in the universe. We enjoy seeing this premise reinforced again (for it is an enjoyable premise, even if we often doubt it in our daily lives) and revel in watching the characters (the various aspects of our own psyche) struggle towards the revalidation of the premise.

It appears to the one who does not enjoy such a genre that there is little action. Only one person dies violently in the film; the movement is stately and sedate; the settings are baroque and rich, the behavior stylized and ritualistic. What you are watching is a narrative version of the Pontifical Solemn High Mass, with the same

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ending: Love wins.

I cannot and do not insist that everyone like this kind of story. I can and do insist, however, against both the angry SF purists and against the contemptuous and often snobbish movie critics, that it is a valid and ancient genre and one which—obviously if one considers the perennial popularity of *Star Trek* and its crew—has an immense appeal to the human love for stories.

You may not like it, in other words, but don't dismiss those who do. There is a very old tradition, dating at least to Homer, of taking pleasure in liturgical narrative.

I like all three genres. I enjoyed *Lathe of Heaven* as I would enjoy a splendid puzzle. I enjoyed *Black Hole* as I would a shoot-'em-up western. I enjoyed *Star Trek* as I would a brilliantly executed liturgy. I'll confess I enjoy the last genre best; that may well be because I have been raised and trained with a certain predilection for the liturgical imagination.

I would urge upon SF devotees a catholic (with a small "c," please) tolerance for this genre. Its themes have always lurked beneath the surface of your genre. It is not such a distant cousin as it might at first seem. Your genre might even benefit from a somewhat more explicit concern with the style and the issues it represents. Even if you are not prepared to concede these points, at least admit that a taste for the morality play is sufficiently ancient and sufficiently reputable as to merit something more than contempt, especially when—within its own framework of assumptions—it is handled as skillfully as Roddenberry normally handles it (the failure of his second TV series, about the rejuvenation of Earth after nuclear holocaust, was a disappointment. It came, I fear, at just the wrong time).

Some of the critics argued that *Star Trek: the Motion Picture* was nothing more than an elongated TV script with special effects. All the morality play enthusiast can reply is, "Sure, but that's what we wanted." I personally enjoyed the special effects. I found the slow-moving pace of the examination of the alien craft anything but dull. However, it was clearly a liturgical ceremony. I thought the multicolored "zap" of the warp effect was brilliantly symbolic. I was also glad to see that the *Enterprise* had been expanded and that the crew had better quarters, more space, and a seemingly endless wardrobe of uniforms.

To tell the truth, I would have preferred a couple of dozen new scripts (to add to the Tucson evening cycle) and the old uniforms, quarters, and special effects. Perhaps, Roddenberry would, too. He

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was, I think, caught in the complex economic and administrative constraints of contemporary film making.

Some of the editing was abrupt and confusing. If one is to judge by the paperback novel (written by Roddenberry) released a few weeks before the film, there was a richer texture to the characters (as well as more explicit eroticism) in the penultimate editing. Someone (accountants, perhaps) elected to go with special effects over characterization.

I also missed the Romulans and was disappointed in the all too brief appearance of the hateful Klingons (who may, come to think of it, represent Satan and his devils). These are minor complaints. The big gripe of the Trekkies I know is that there will probably be no more trips on the *Enterprise*. Nonetheless, Jim Kirk's final instruction to Sulu, "Take it out there—Thataway!" is an appropriately rich liturgical conclusion: "Go in Peace, the Mass is over!" . . . "Thanks be to God!"

I hope that Roddenberry continues to explore the rich vein the morality-play tradition offers. I hope that some day there will even be a journal for such stories.

If Spock is a priest, a friend argued, he ought to be elected a bishop. What a marvelous bishop such a logical, multi-skilled man would be (note, by the way, his celibacy).

"Why stop there," another friend demanded. "Make him Pope! A Vulcan Pope!"

To which I replied, "Have you taken a close look at the man we have now?"

HAIKU FOR THE SPACE SHUTTLE

Spear cast thundering,
wounds the cold, snow-flecked heavens;
futures opening.

—Robert Frazier

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IT'S OKAY TO LIKE THE *STAR TREK* MOVIE

by Bill Warren

Mr. Warren assisted Walt Lee in the Reference Guide to Fantastic Films. *He is now working on a two-volume book on SF films of the 1950s, for McFarland & Co., and is extremely anxious to see certain films of that era:* The Whip Hand, Devil Girl from Mars, Half Human, Immediate Disaster, *and* Enemy from Space.

Whatever its failings, *Star Trek: the Motion Picture* is true to its title. It is precisely as advertised: a great big, fancy "Star Trek" episode. The characters are basically the same as they were on the show, though it takes a while for Spock (Leonard Nimoy) to fit back into his character. Kirk is still Kirk, Bones is still Bones, and the rest of the crew are as they were before.

Anyone who was expecting something different, something more, was bound to be disappointed. Trekkies (the distinction between "Trekkies" and "Trekkers" exists only in the minds of those who count themselves in the latter group) may not even like the film all that much, but it's unlikely that they'll have much to complain about in terms of duplication of the show, physically, as well as in terms of plot and characterization. The sets are different, of course, for a variety of reasons (some involving legalities, I'm told), but despite an overall design modification, the spaceship we see is still recognizably the *Enterprise*.

Even the unfortunate aspects of the TV series are slavishly duplicated. The characters are colorful but hardly deep, the relationships between them can be stated in a few short phrases, and these relationships do not change. The makeup of the crew still resembles that of a WWII bomber movie crew: one Oriental, one Russian (a bow to *current* political tensions, not any of the future), one black/woman, a couple of aliens, a crusty doctor, a Scottish engineer, and so forth. (I suspect the aliens are in place of the traditional Jew.)

The philosophical content is still essentially shallow. At the climax, everyone blandly accepts a new amalgam of humanity and machine which has learned so much it *must* explore new levels of

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being, other dimensions. This is mentioned as a fine thing to do, then brushed aside: it's the Explanation for all that has happened, but it doesn't carry any meaning beyond the plot. And the characters act as if they know it—that their encounter with Vejur is just another incident in an ongoing series of incidents.

But the good aspects of the show are also replicated in the film. It's intensely hopeful and optimistic—the future seems full of promise and excitement. Most of mankind's problems have been solved; there are distant worlds to explore; there's enough danger to make life exciting. It's a universe that, in many ways, it would be fun to live in, and unlike *Star Wars*, this is recognizably our *own* universe, our *own* future. And it is a future worth working for, at least for the majority of watchers of the series.

Almost everyone I know who has seen *Star Trek: TMP* has been disappointed in it. Some because they were expecting it to be something other than what it had to be, and some because the film is too slow, too uninvolving and not rich enough.

Gene Roddenberry, Robert Wise, and the writers (Harold Livingston, script; Alan Dean Foster, original story) made some basic errors. The film leans heavily on nostalgia for the TV show; each of the three original leads, Kirk, Spock, and McCoy, is given a showy entrance with a pause for audience applause. This may seem unavoidable to some—the Trekkies *did* go wild for those characters—but what about the vast majority of potential filmgoers the world over who have never heard of (or have forgotten) the TV series? These showcased entrances are momentary dead spots in the film.

Furthermore, the character relationships rely too much on our previous knowledge of the TV series. We apparently should already know that Kirk and Spock were close friends, that the *Enterprise* meant life itself to Kirk, that McCoy and Spock had a barely-unarmed truce/mutual respect, and so forth. We had *better* know these things, because the film certainly doesn't spell them out; they are givens. Each is simply mentioned, as if there was a checklist of surefire elements that had to be included.

These reliances on nostalgia only damage the film for non-aficionados. Furthermore, the fact that the TV series of "Star Trek" has such a devotedly fanatical following works against the film for many viewers. They resist the appeal of the picture, partly I suppose because they don't want to be thought of as following the crowd. The picture had been widely heralded: books about it crowd the newsstands; articles turned up in many magazines; the advertising made it look as though we should anticipate nothing less than The

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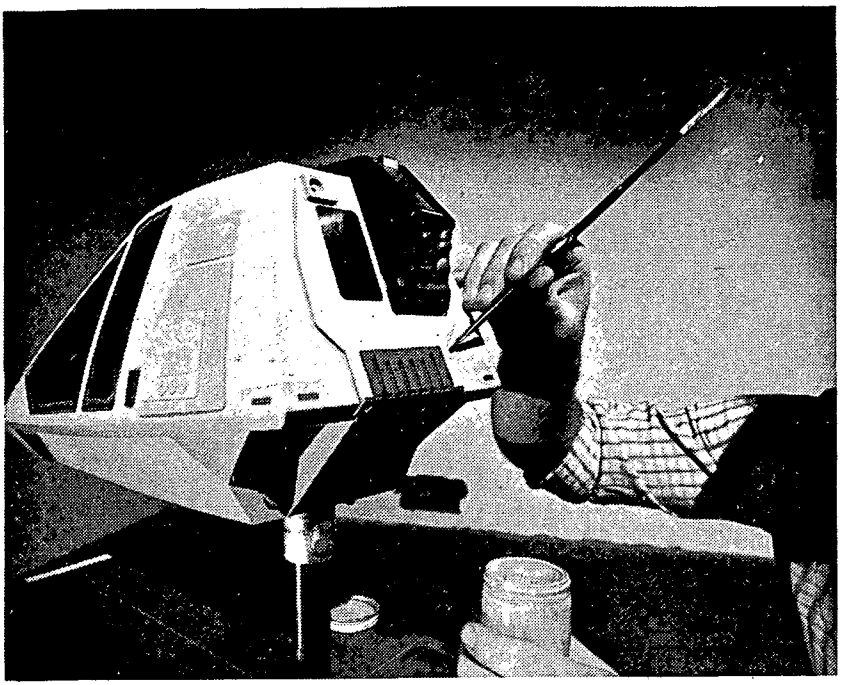

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A technician puts the finishing touches on a model for a small worker craft, one of those seen flitting about the drydock near the movie's start.

Second Coming (for *that*, wait for the third *Omen* film). This pressure-to-approve caused, as it always does, a reverse tendency-to-dislike; and as a result, the film has been far more harshly criticized than it deserves.

While it is not a *great* movie by any standards other than technical, it is far better than its detractors *want* it to be. No one likes to run with a herd (especially a herd as peculiar as Trekkies); but when that is a possibility, reviewers and audiences should be aware of the countertendency to overly-dislike something. *Star Trek: the Motion Picture* is a good, solid film with many virtues; it is much more to be respected than maligned. Its failings are partly those of imagination, partly of creation, and partly due to production errors. None of them damage it irreparably; and I'm suspicious of someone who says they hate it, not of their taste, but of their motivations for expressing such a basically unjustified dislike. Sure, the film is a little dull; but that's only damage, not complete destruction.

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The special effects are superb, especially considering that the crew that did them had almost no time to finish the job. Originally, the effects were under the supervision of Robert Abel & Associates. Abel had produced several effective TV commercials (the "it's the light" series for 7UP, the trademark sequences for Levi), but had never done the effects for a feature film. Apparently his judgement and timing were deficient; his skills remain untested. After months of showing no results, he was finally confronted by Roddenberry and Wise and told to show everything he had on film—which, reportedly, was only a few short moments of black-and-white test footage. He was summarily dismissed, and apparently the gentle-natured and normally very pleasant Robert Wise lost his temper quite badly. This is the major reason the budget became so amazingly large ($45–$52 million).

Something Abel did remains in the movie, but I haven't heard for sure what it is. One report had it that the visual blurring of the characters during the wormhole sequence was by Abel, but this hasn't been confirmed by anyone who worked on the picture.

So Abel was out. In a panic, Paramount contracted Douglas Trumbull, who after *2001, Silent Running,* and *Close Encounters* was not anxious to do another space film. Paramount made the job worthwhile (supposedly by guaranteeing financing for one of his own films); and with only a few months to go before the contractually-obligated release date, he began work. John Dykstra (*Star Wars, Battlestar Galactica*) came aboard, and their combined crews worked seven days a week and up to eighteen hours a day. They still didn't get everything done, and the effects are not as complex as either team wanted. Still, at their best, the special effects are the finest I have ever seen.

Kirk's circling of the refurbished *Enterprise* is a tour-de-force. For some viewers, this five-minute sequence (I timed it) is too long; but I found it fascinating and satisfying. Light and shadow from the miniature set play across the faces of Shatner and Doohan as they cruise around the spaceship. The model work here is very fine, and I saw only one trembling matte. Space seems very busy, and it looks different from any other space-set film I've seen.

The journey of the *Enterprise* through the cloud and along the top of Vejur is also dazzling. But at ten minutes it's definitely too long, and there's nothing to break up the sameness of the visuals except a few shots of awe-struck people on the ship's bridge. Jerry Goldsmith's superb score helps immeasurably, but the sequence eventually becomes numbing.

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The storyline is too thin for a feature film of this length; and as a result, the picture is somewhat draggy. Part of this is due to something that might actually be considered sheer nobility of motive: Roddenberry was apparently determined to make a non-violent, humanistic film. This is the only big-budget SF film I know of to have received a G rating by the Ratings Board. There isn't even a single kiss in the film, and almost no bodily contact at all. There's no real violence—even the destructions of the Klingon ships and the Federation base occur in clouds of electrical light and seem abstract. No one is seen to be suffering at length; and the only people in the film who even undergo pain are the two people caught in the transporter failure and later, Chekhov and Spock, quite briefly. Unfortunately, this absolute avoidance of on-screen violence results in a lack of excitement. Once aboard the *Enterprise,* the story takes place almost entirely on the bridge; the few glimpses we get of the rest of the ship are less than we would have gotten in an average TV episode.

The creation of the film was a long and involved process. In 1976, Paramount decided to go ahead with a *Star Trek* feature, apparently being spurred on by the success of *Star Wars*—which, in turn, had owed a fair amount of *its* success to the "Star Trek" TV series (the similarity of titles is no accident). The budget for the first-announced *Trek* movie was in the $5–$7 million range, certainly nothing huge.

Roddenberry wrote the first script; his initial idea was to show what might be called "the secret origin of Star Trek," depicting the early careers of the crew and their coming together on the *Enterprise.* He discarded this unpromising idea for a story in which God goes crazy, and the *Enterprise*'s crew must destroy Him/Her/It. He submitted this script in June 1975; and it was promptly rejected. Many writers then submitted scripts and/or treatments, or were approached in other ways. This group included John D. F. Black, Robert Silverberg, Harlan Ellison, Ray Bradbury, and Theodore Sturgeon, among others. These were all rejected by Roddenberry or Paramount.

Roddenberry persisted. Jon Povill wrote a script in early 1976, which was also rejected. By July 1976, Jerry Isenberg was put on the project as executive producer; and British writers Chris Bryant and Allan Scott were assigned to write a supposedly final script. (The storyline hasn't been divulged, but it apparently involved alien biology. One wonders why all these storylines haven't turned up in the novels based on the series.) This script too was eventually rejected. By this time, director Phil Kaufman (who eventually made

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Models of the actors were presumably used in the sequence in which Captain Kirk takes a tour of the refurbished Enterprise.

the fine new *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*) had been assigned; and he rewrote the Bryant-Scott script. After several months in pre-production, the film was cancelled altogether. This is a pity, because it would probably have been very good.

Around this time, a new method of marketing TV series began to be investigated. The miniseries "Testimony of Two Men" had proved successful when it was run on stations not affiliated with networks. Paramount had the bright idea to revive the "Star Trek" TV series itself and to peddle it to America's non-affiliated stations. Many of the original cast members were signed for what was then called "Star Trek II." Scripts were commissioned. Among the writers: Alan Dean Foster, Margaret Armen & Alf Harris, Shimon Wincelberg, Norman Spinrad, Jon Povill & Jason Summers, Worley Thorne, John Meredyth Lucas, Richard Bach, Art Lewis, Theodore Sturgeon, Bill Lansford, and David Ambrose.

In an article in issue #11 of *Starlog* magazine, Susan Sackett

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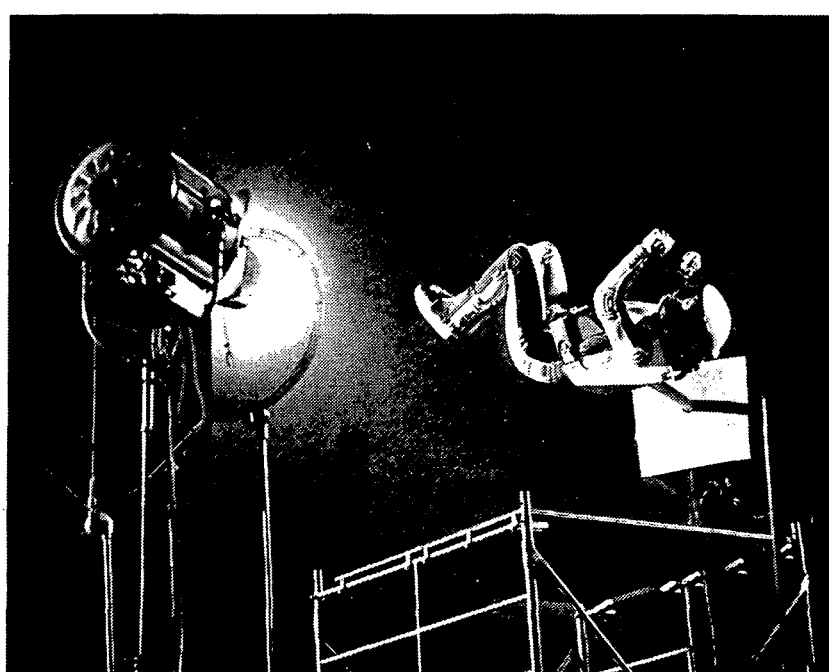
described the two-hour series opener that had been written by Foster. "[He] has written the story . . . (which most likely will be released theatrically abroad). Its title: 'In Thy Image.' While we can't disclose the storyline yet, we will have a chance to see Earth in the 23rd century, Star Fleet Headquarters, and the *Enterprise* being refitted while docked in Earth orbit." It was this television story that became the basis of *Star Trek: the Motion Picture.*

The scuttlebutt around Hollywood at the time was that when the studio rather abruptly changed its mind from doing a revived TV series to a large-budget feature film, the only storyline available and complete *and* which met with studio brass approval was Foster's outline. According to Foster, he had "no idea why my story was selected as the basis for the feature film . . . I do know that they planned to reopen the TV series with a two-hour show and that I had developed the story beyond the usual one-hour length."

When asked how much remained of his own story, he responded:



Leonard Nimoy (or his double) during the filming of Spock's journey into the center of Vejur.

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"When I turned in the last draft of my treatment, that was the end of my involvement with the project. The kernel of the story is Roddenberry's. There were also extensive story sessions with [Harold] Livingston, Jon Povill and perhaps one or two others from time to time. . . . I did all the writing, however. . . . I'd say 60–70% [of my story remained]." Although the screen credits only Foster and Livingston, Roddenberry did provide the basis for the original story and also worked on the final script, which was reworked by Dennis Lynton Clark.

It should be pointed out (as many Trekkies already have) that the film's story is similar to several previous series episodes, in particular "The Doomsday Machine" and "The Changeling." The latter was about an Earth space probe called Nomad that had been altered into a dangerously destructive force (which is why some have been calling the feature "Where Nomad Has Gone Before"). Alan Foster admits that not only did the germ of the story idea come from Roddenberry, but that Foster himself had never seen either of those two episodes. That lets Foster off the hook but leaves Roddenberry dangling. Surely he must have realized the story similarities? My guess is that he was so attracted by his search-for-godhood theme that he either forgot about Nomad, or hoped that the fans would.

Foster also mentioned some elements in his treatment that were left out of the film. Originally, after Vejur had launched the satellites which were to wipe out human life on Earth, Kirk was going to try to talk Vejur out of it; failing that, he was going to blow up the *Enterprise* and, he hoped, Vejur as well. A stray line by McCoy ("there's only ten minutes left") survives in the film, referring to the timed detonation of the *Enterprise*. Likewise, another stray line by Decker refers to "NASA" rather abruptly, as if the topic had been raised before. Which it had, in the first script. Originally, Vejur knew the name of its "God," which was Nassa, but thankfully someone realized that NASA is generally pronounced that way and so there would be little surprise about Vejur's origin if "Nassa" was constantly referred to.

Foster says, "There were a couple of action sequences that were changed. In the original treatment, [the Vulcan] really appears to be aiding the alien. So does the *Enterprise*'s computer. All to add to the suspense. Also, the alien, instead of planning to wipe out all the carbon units on Earth, plans to 'free' Earth's machines. Kirk has to go down to Earth to get the NASA code; and while he's there, we [were to] see a great deal of destruction caused by the local machinery going berserk." One can understand why these ideas

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were left out of the final film, as they would have only complicated matters; but nothing as dynamic was found to replace them.

The film fails as an intellectual statement about man's place in the universe and about the eventual fate of man and his machines. Themes broached are thereafter avoided. The cast treat monumental events as if they were trivial happenings. Long special-effects sequences bleed vitality from the film. The dialog is ponderous, the characterization dead-end.

Ultimately, what the film is about must be balanced against what it actually achieves. The theme that is so prominent in Roddenberry's surprisingly good novelization of the film is almost absent from the movie. In the novel, Kirk tries to make himself believe that the only reason he takes over the *Enterprise* is because he's the man to save the world—he has the experience. Eventually, he realizes that he simply wants control of *his* ship again. In the film, after the wormhole sequence, the doubting Kirk is gone and never reappears. The conflict between Kirk and Decker simply vanishes.

In the film, Kirk thinks at first that he's taking over because he is the best qualified to fight the menace, and that indeed does seem to be his goal there. Decker's petulant response, that Kirk really only wants the ship again, seems ungenerous and whiney.

Kirk's love for and identification with the ship is one of the main themes of the TV series, and is traditional military melodrama. It should have been treated much more prominently and strongly in the film than it is. I think that this storyline was much more fruitful than the clichéd and easily-dismissed romance between Decker and Ilia. (As a matter of fact, the novel makes more use of the idea of the romance as well. The film could have, but it really wouldn't have added a great deal.)

For me, the major theme in the film isn't the synthesis of man and machine that forms the climax, but the effect that finally finding ultimate logic has on Spock. Although the film is told almost first-person from Kirk's point of view, Spock is in a sense the central character. Vejur, the transmogrified *Voyager 6*, is a machine and a vast intellect. It has been changed, from a simple probe whose uncomplicated programming directed it to seek information and report it to NASA back on Earth, to a huge, destructive machine which gathers all knowledge and intends to carry it back to Earth where its god dwells.

The idea that we all seek our creator is mildly interesting, but it's hardly profound or even psychologically accurate. Theologians may disagree, but I don't feel that the drive to find Prime Cause is

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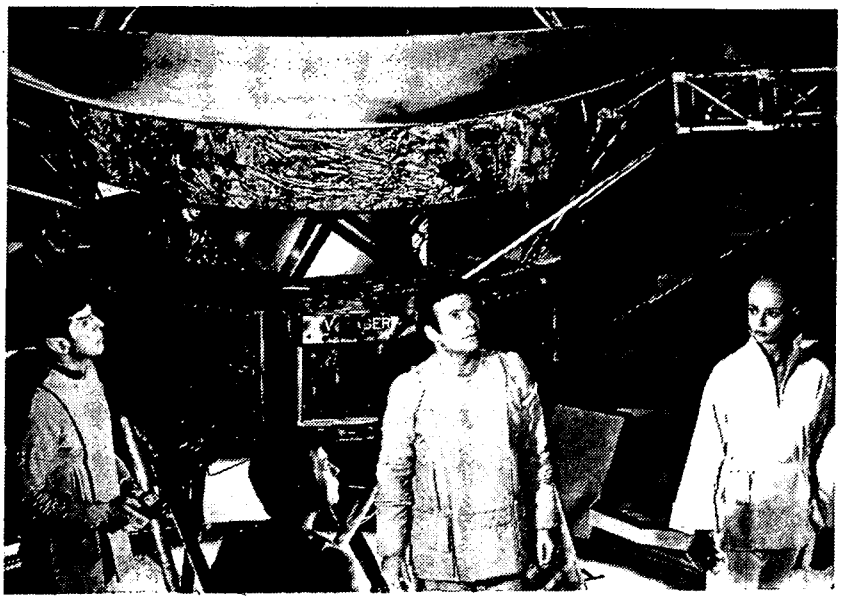
central to consciousness. There are intelligent people and ethical structures and—one can imagine—intelligent races which would be fully content dealing with the here-and-now, whose curiosity is strictly pragmatic and confined to reality. I suspect a machine would most likely be that way, should it become aware; a computer seeking god is a science fiction cliché, nonetheless. Spock is closer to the truth when he says, "It knows only that it needs . . . but like so many of us, it does not know what." Precisely. It would seem that the desire to transmit information back to Earth would *not* take the form of a search for God, but the form perhaps of a sexual drive.

This idea that intelligence must seek its creator is almost literally sophomoric. It's the kind of debate popular among undergraduates at colleges, stretching their awareness; and the thought that it could be literalized in a machine capable of generating a forcefield almost eight *billion* miles across is simply an enlargement of this intellectual game. It's not profound, it certainly isn't very dramatic, and it is awfully hard to make visual.

But Spock's search for supreme logic *is* inherently dramatic, as applied to his established character. He fails in his search for the



Leonard Nimoy, Deforest Kelly, William Shatner, and Persis Khambatta confront Vejur in a scene from Star Trek, the Motion Picture.

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Vulcan equivalent of Nirvana—surrendering all emotion to purest logic—because the approaching presence of Vejur distracts him, or so we are told. Actually, of course, he is unable to completely throw off the human half of his consciousness. (Query: if Vejur is pulling at his logical side, why doesn't it attract all Vulcans? Possible answer: it does, but curiosity is not necessarily a function of logic; it is a function of emotion, and thereby appeals to Spock's human side.)

Spock finally confronts ultimate logic in the film's most intriguing and visually splendid sequence (the last effects scene completed, apparently, and a total revision of a similar sequence already filmed), his solo journey into the heart of Vejur where he performs a telepathic "mind-meld" with the giant machine. The blast of soulless logic that he gets then makes him accept his human nature, rather than bringing about the ultimate triumph of his Vulcan side, which seems to be what he had hoped for and expected.

The mind-meld blasts Spock into unconsciousness; and when he awakes in the sick bay, he's laughing. He calls Kirk by his first name, and says, "With all its pure logic, Vejur is barren, cold; no mystery, no beauty." This is Spock's great revelation. During the run of the series, his growth as a *human* being was almost the only developing thread the show had. At the end of the series's run, Spock had become more completely human than he was at the beginning. (It's interesting that this humanizing of aliens is a common theme in science fiction films, though not so much in SF literature. In fact, only the underrated *The Man Who Fell To Earth* treats this process as a possible tragedy. And that came from a novel.)

Unfortunately, so much of the drama of Spock's final conversion depends on having known the TV series that it falls somewhat flat in the film. Nimoy struggles to externalize Spock's conflict before the spacewalk, but there's little room in the script for this. He's a good but studied actor; he never seems to quite get deeply into his rôles, always holding something back, never quite relaxing and simply being the character. Perhaps that's why he's at his best as Spock. This half-Vulcan, half-human hybrid (biologically absurd) has a greater wellspring of emotion than other Vulcans—they are born with emotions, but give them up voluntarily, but Spock's half-human—and the tension of his rôle comes from his willing and conscious repression of his human emotions.

The actor Nimoy always lets us know that Spock does indeed feel these emotions. He has to remain impassive, and tells us Spock is suffering by body language, very small facial changes, and so forth. The final acceptance of his human side is the richest material, the-

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matically, because it is the most character-oriented. The supposedly main idea in the film of a human being merging with a machine that is seeking god is only intellectual and almost silly. It is almost impossible to become *emotionally* engaged by such an idea, even if it had been done more compellingly than it is here. The real meat of the film, because one's emotions are engaged as in good drama, lies in the relationship betwen Spock and *his* emotions.

This theme is muffled by Robert Wise's unemphatic direction. Wise was once a very good director; his *The Day the Earth Stood Still* is still one of the best science fiction movies ever made; and *The Haunting,* though a little studied, is a fine horror film. As far back as his first directorial effort, *Curse of the Cat People,* he showed sensitivity; and his editing on such films as *The Devil and Daniel Webster* and *Citizen Kane* showed great dynamism. As late as *West Side Story* and *The Sound of Music,* Wise still demonstrated talent, but by the time of *The Andromeda Strain, The Hindenburg,* and *Audrey Rose,* he seems to have surrendered his insights and emotions to processes. In *The Andromeda Strain* Wise didn't even bother to establish characters at all. Everything was subjugated to the idea, and the only visual inventiveness was in the set design. The film was a sterile void; it had some interest at the end, but not because people you liked were in danger. *Audrey Rose* had the additional problem of a silly, undeveloped story; the actors were unsympathetic, and the characterization was basically trite. *The Hindenburg* was a much better film, largely because of the idea; but there were better, more appealing actors.

In *Star Trek: the Motion Picture* Wise was clearly hampered by many elements. The film had to not only be recognizable to "Star Trek" fans, but it had to end with an openness that would allow further development, more movies, or a new series. The characters (and actors) were established by the show. Wise admits that the actors generally knew more about their characterization than he did, which is another way of saying he found it difficult to superimpose his ideas on an existing structure. Instead of being a creative director, Wise here seems reduced to a traffic cop. And, as I said, it's unclear that at this point in his career, Wise could have offered much in the first place. Robert Kaufman probably would have made the film more vital and lively, despite its confined, uneventful script.

Wise did have a problem with one of his leads. Stephen Collins, playing Decker, is a bad actor. It's unclear to me why he was chosen for the rôle, but the selection was almost disastrous. Collins has only two expressions, less intense and more intense, and his face is

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ingenuous and bland. It's his unconvincing delivery that almost fatally damages the climax. He's a TV actor, and looks and acts like it. A more experienced actor would have been a much better choice.

Persis Khambatta as the strangely-fated Ilia has been undercut by advance publicity playing on the fact that in the film she's totally bald. As a result, few will find it easy to get their eyes off that naked dome, though she does seem attractive that way.

The character she plays has two manifestations, and with a minimum of obvious acting tricks, she embodies both of them subtly and expertly. Khambatta expresses fine shadings of emotions through her large, liquid eyes and sensuous lips; her movements are graceful and fluid. She should have a rewarding career. (Incidentally, when she first arrived in London from her native India, she became enamored of the "Star Trek" series, and wanted very much to appear on it. She was disappointed to learn it had been out of production for years.)

I've never been a Trekkie. That I have, I think, seen all the episodes of the TV series is more a matter of chance than of choice. I have generally liked William Shatner, however. Trekkies have tended to claim that it was Leonard Nimoy as Spock who was the heart of "Star Trek." I felt that instead it was Kirk (as Roddenberry intended). He represented the best and worst of humanity, and had more facets than the others in the show; hence, he was the leading personality as well as, of course, the character who dominated almost every script. Kirk is not a complicated man. He's intensely romantic; he's intelligent and a strong leader. His sense of humor and of personal ridiculousness save him from pomposity, and he often ends up somewhat sheepish.

Shatner annoys many people with his theatrical flamboyance, but he's the kind of broad actor I enjoy the most. I tend to like good-natured showoffs of all varieties; and his tremendous joy at simply being an actor is, for me, very infectious. (Although he is not in their league, I also find this flamboyance and joy in most of the performances of James Mason, Charles Laughton, and Laurence Olivier, who are about as good as actors get.) He's certainly *never* dull. At his worst, Shatner can be only a bundle of showy affectations; I suspect that this occurs when he hasn't studied the rôle carefully, or failed to absorb it into his own personality.

In the case of Kirk, however, the rôle seems to *be* the actor, and vice versa. The few times I've seen him in person, he seems very much like Kirk. When Shatner really reaches, goes out for the big effects, he can rise to heights that a more cautious, laid-back actor

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like Nimoy can never hope to reach. He may be unbridled at times, but he does run fast and fine.

In the script, the last two lines Kirk has are written very flatly, and too flippantly. I don't know if it was Shatner or Wise who altered the reading of those lines (though I suspect it was the actor), but the end result is almost perfection. They sum up Kirk and the show as well.

He's asked, where to now, Captain. And for a moment, Kirk is lost in himself, seeing only far suns and distant planets and the lure and glamour of space. He leans forward, almost literally starry-eyed, and whispers, "Out there." And he realizes how a star-struck captain might look to his crew, glances from side to side, and leans back, a little embarrassed. "Thataway," he says, waving a negligent hand. The scene is over in just an instant, but it's just simply swell. The *Enterprise* takes off.

The film is not perfect: it is nothing more than the 80th episode of the series, with more money behind it. But, especially on a second viewing, it proves to be a decent, solid work of commercial craft. It's bold, it tries to be about something, and it looks wonderful. It is still "Star Trek" tried and true; and despite its length and slowness, it ultimately made me feel that sense of wonder that only the most exciting science fiction can. I hope the *Enterprise* journeys long and prosperously.

Out there.

Thataway.

NEXT TIME...

The September issue of *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* will present a science fiction first: no less than five stories, each one independently written around the same cover painting. The cover is by Alex Schomburg; the stories are by Jack C. Haldeman II, Sharon Webb (two), John M. Ford, and Somtow Sucharitkul. Other stories and articles by J. O. Jeppson, Milton Rothman, and Jeff Duntemann will round out the issue.

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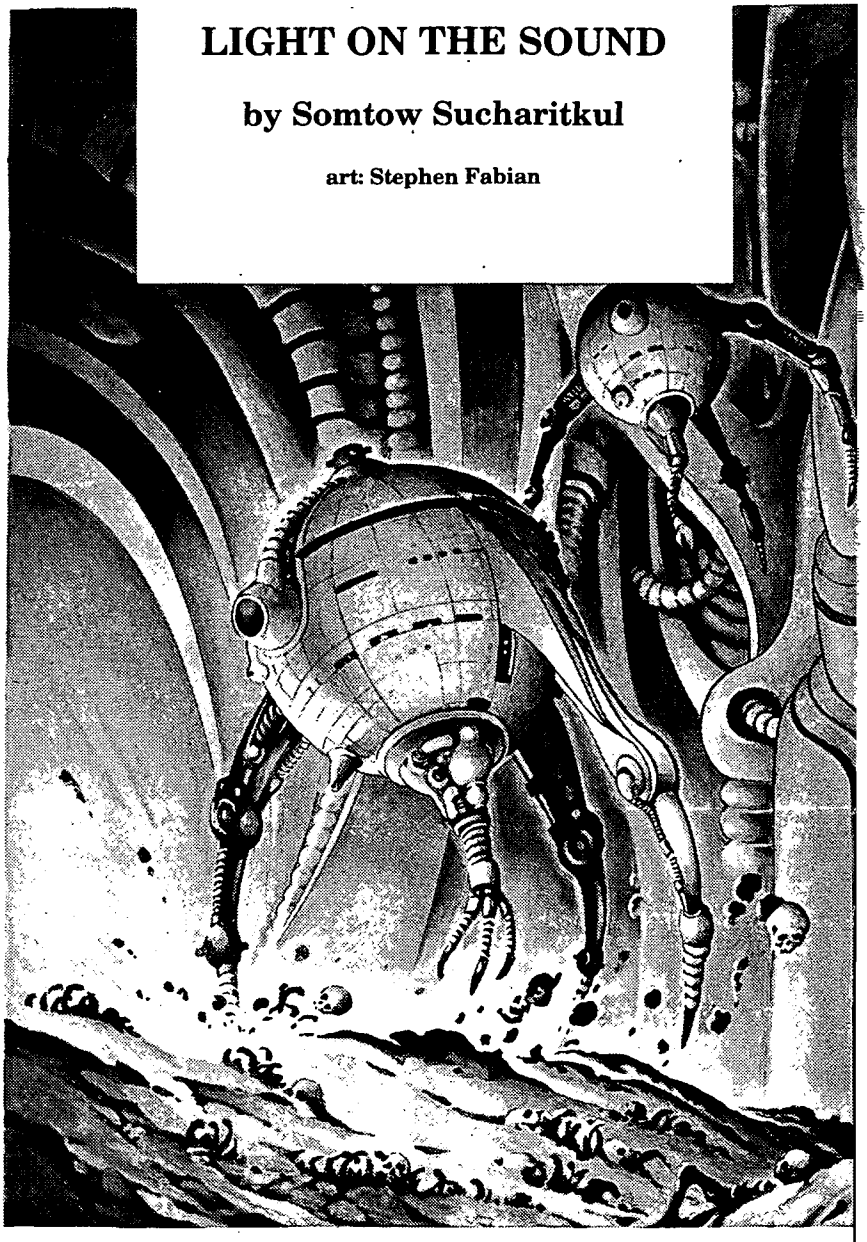
LIGHT ON THE SOUND

by Somtow Sucharitkul

art: Stephen Fabian



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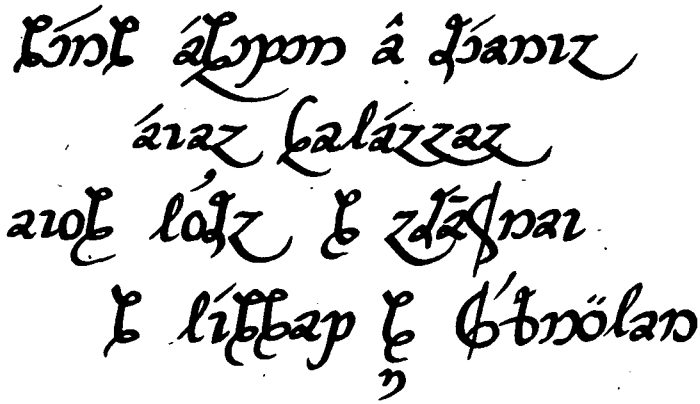
Mr. Sucharitkul suggests that by now the readers may be tired of hearing of his strange career and peregrinations. Instead, he offers the following list of likes and dislikes. He likes: rollercoasters, Mozart, children, orange sherbert with hot fudge sauce (!!), particle physics, and whales. He dislikes: vinegar, nature, politics, disco music, and cockroaches. He is single. By the way, he adds, watch for his forthcoming novel, The Starship & the Haiku, *soon to be released by Pocket Books.*



zenzAtheren a Kéanis
aias Talássas
aiud lukhs de' skaapnai
z líddar den ýpnolan

On the Sunless Sound
On the sighing sea
Came light from the shapers
and songs from the Dreamers

—Gallendaran folk song

ONE: THE OVERCOSM

At the core of the curving of time and space, the overcosm coiled.

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A cosmic serpent. A monster of non-Euclidean paradoxes . . . beyond, between the dimensions of realspace that men perceive.

In the overcosm light went mad and battered the senses with music of color, and time became irrelevant.

Through the overcosm, pinholing from star to interstellar blacknesses to the hearts of dusty nebulae—ran hidden paths. Paths that could only be understood as abstruse equations in the memories of planet-sized thinkhives that stored all knowledge of the Dispersal of Man and wove perpetual patterns out of the chaos of data. Paths that could shorten the distances between the stars . . . if only someone could perceive them.

The paths are nothings now; they are power-paths that have rendered secure the power of the Inquest over the million known worlds, over the twenty millennia of the Dispersal of Man.

But once upon a time, there were travellers, travelling in the old way, searching for the paths: searching for centuries, sleeping mostly, awakening in new regions of spacetime, searching a little, then dying . . . and they found a planet, which they named in the old hightongue that is still used by the Inquest, Gallendys.

What a strange planet it was!

On one of its continents, a volcanic crater stood, its walls a hundred klomets high, breaching the stratosphere; a thousand klomets wide, the walls rising pyramidally to an opening narrower than a single man. In the crater, no light fell. Not even starlight through the roofchink. For in the crater there survived a dense atmosphere, from a forgotten eon in the planet's past; and there was only darkness and the churning winds, howling like anguished animals over Keian zenzAtheren, the Sunless Sound.

Elsewhere, the planet seemed human enough: here a desert, there a sea, here a valley for a Kingling's pleasure garden, here a mineful of precious ores fit for a punitive colony.

But over the Sunless Sound, in the hidden country of darkness—

They found vast creatures, Windbringers, who swam through the thick air. With huge, formless brains, a hundred meters long, and borne aloft by a tang-scented light air they puffed into huge flapping sailsacs.

What a dull perceptual cosmos for them, if they had been built like men! There would have been nothing to see but the darkness, nothing to hear but the whistling of their selfmade winds. But their minds were turned inward. They perceived the overcosm directly, that part of space that is at once the center and the farthest edge of spacetime.

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In the darkness they soared up from Sound to ceiling, from wall's edge to wall's edge—

And they sang!

Imagesongs. Lightpoems that shattered the thick darkness. Harmonies that bounced and rebounded from the whispering walls, echoshifting, never quite dying, so that the whole enclosed world resounded with the weavings of their overcosmic visions. They sang and were at peace.

Until men came.

They heard and saw the imagesongs. It was said that even the high warriors of the Dispersal wept, that even the stern Inquestors, Lords of the Dispersal, were so moved that their shimmercloaks glistened with tears.

The imagesongs were the key to the overcosm, to unravelling the quickpaths between the stars. They had to understand them! For they had a need to leap from star to star, to trade, fight, conquer, to stand on ever-new earths. . . .

But no. Those who experienced the imagesongs wept and were changed, and declared that they had seen perfect beauty and that the desires of men no longer touched them. The Inquest, as always, found a way.

Then more men came who could not weep at the imagesongs. And then the imagesongs burst and resounded over the darkness, but the men did not see or hear them. They were blind and deaf; and the Inquest saw this as an act of compassion. Not knowing they could not see or hear, they were free men.

Or thought they were.

TWO: THE SHADOW OF SKYWALL

Great eyes of a young boy staring at the endless Skywall—

"Don't dawdle, Kelver!"

Kelver pressed another button. A bale of food vanished from the displacement plate. And then—

Skywall! They called it a hundred-klomet-high mountain that penetrated the roof of the atmosphere, a mountain a thousand klomets long . . . to him it was Skywall, an utter blackness that halved the zenith, that divided the world into known and unknown. And behind it—the mythical dark country.

For a great distance the mountain was perpendicular and quite black; further up it dissolved into a sheer mist flecked with greenery,

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and higher still, at the limits of perception, more blackness.

You could pretend the black was a giant holoscreen. You could project your fantasies on it, say it was the blackness of space and spatter it with stars and planets and hurl yourself into the thick of the overcosm wars.

Kelver had passed his third winter: fourteen years that was in the highspeech of the Inquestors. And when you were fourteen and stuck in a backvillage, with no clan-name, and you'd never been so much as a step off-planet, not even to the moons—what could you do? Dream. Make alien things in the Skywall, that only you could see.

From the side of the Skywall mountain, perhaps a hundred meters up, the Cold River began, enclosed in its own metal wall and borne on pylons, dropping at a sharp angle until it reached ground level and stretching on forever away from the Skywall, impossibly straight.

Kelver pressed another button idly.

"Kelver—" it was Uncle Aaye.

"It's pointless anyway," he said. "We're just pressing buttons and food is disappearing, and we always do this every week and it's a waste. . . ."

He pressed a button. Another basket of fresh meat vanished.

Uncle's voice: "You know as well as I do, Kevi. It's to feed the other people, the people in the Dark Country."

As if anyone could live inside a mountain.

"Uncle, uncle, this whole setup insults our intelligence! Why do we have to grow food for ten times the village population, and then sit here and watch it disappear?"

"Quiet!" Uncle Aaye grated. "I'm ashamed of you!" He looked away as if terribly embarrassed.

I'll slip away, Kelver said to himself suddenly. *Nobody will mind, really.*

So he did.

First he reached the edge of the village of porcelain houses, shunning the displacement plates that would have eased his feet. Then he passed the place where workmen tended the source of the Cold River. He started to run faster.

Got to get out of the shadow world—

Some days when the Skywall cast no shadow, when the suns were in opposition, you could hurl a ripe krellash at the wall and watch it sizzle and plummet, and you could run with the hot sour juice dribbling into you until you started to run into a country inside

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your head, a country of subtle shifting lights . . . but in the shadowtime you could freeze the same krellash against the wall, into an icecandy. In the shadowtime—and he had seen three of them—you couldn't run to the edge of the Skywall's shadow. Not in a day's running.

Run! Run!

He had to get away. And think. A strange anger drove him. He wasn't the thinking sort, so he couldn't define it. Like—an anger of wanting but not knowing what you wanted. He took it out on the hard earth, pounding the softness out of his fursoles, banging the rocksmooth ground.

He had to run anyway, for the cold. Shovelling food had warmed him for a while, but it was a deceiving warmth. He was wearing nothing but a small cloak of costly clingfire that his Uncle had brought back from Effelkang the great city . . .

At the edge of shadow he braked himself.

A tongue of sweat licked at his hard little body, honed by the sandsharp winds from the badlands of Zhnefftikak. He was lean, his muscles wound tight like the strings of a whisperlyre. Only his eyes showed any softness . . . they were green. Like the furgrass that dappled the walls of the Cold River, where moisture had condensed from the burning cold behind its crystal clear, Inquest-built walls. It was along the Cold River that the earth was hospitable enough for villages.

He sprang out the cooldark shadow land—

Lightblaze. Twin suns, white and blue.

The system of displacement plates had ended. Ahead of him lay a glarewavering carpet of chalksand.

It was a world of straight, everstretching lines for Kelver. The mathematical straightness of the Cold River, the sky-splitting straightness of Skywall, the far white horizon, razorstraight from eye's end to eye's end, and always the same. . . .

There was a world of curves out there. Far beyond the Zhnefftikak wasteland. A journey of maybe a hundred sunpassings. There was the Sea of Tulangdaror, the twin cities of Effelkang and Kallendrang, one hoverfloating over the sea, the other high in the sky. You could see it as a star sometimes—Kallendrang that is—when the two sunpassings coincided and the bright side of Skywall became a flickerflecked darkness for a few hours. . . .

He longed for the world of curves. But he didn't really believe in it. He didn't believe anything his uncle told him, anymore. Even though his uncle was Elder of the Foodmovers and an Interpreter

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and had a clan-name, too.

He looked up.

The blue eye danced with the white, in the dazzleglare of the sky, and—

A black bubble burst from between the suns.

It fell. Grew. Kelver froze.

The bubble fell more, in a delicate spiral, and he couldn't tell how far it was or how big it was because everything was so featureless, so white . . .

The silence was eerie.

It grew to fist size, then balloon-size, then—

A hail of bubbles, popping from nowhere in mid-sky! Blotting out patches of the whiteness, cascading, dancing so slowly, so . . . *It's something special! It's just for me!*

They were all growing now. One of them swooped above his head not twenty meters, and it was larger than a man, he saw, larger than several men. And then they all swung past his head, figure-eighted above each other, and there was a breeze, parch-hot, springing up in its wake—

Got to tell someone. Maybe it's important.

For a moment he panicked. He didn't want anyone to know about it, he wanted to clutch the secret to himself for a few moments—

He tensed for the sprint back to the first displacement plate, stopped himself, turned. . . .

It *was* real.

He dashed into shadow. The shadow swallowed him. Almost as though the wall itself had eaten him.

He found them shovelling more food.

He flung himself through the crowd of workers, elbowing a woman aside. "Uncle Aaye!" he shouted.

The big displacement plate had been emptied. He saw his uncle's face mirrored in it, furrowed and unpleasant. The metal, curved a little, widened the face like a balloon. He crossed the plate and went to his uncle.

"How many times have I told you not to run over a displacement plate like that? Kevi, you could find yourself in the middle of Skywall, buried in solid rock under a hundred klomets of basalt!"

"I'm sorry, uncle." Then, bursting with what he'd seen, "Uncle Aaye—if only you'd seen it! Outside, beyond shadow, today—"

"If only!" Uncle Aaye sighed. "You should have been shovelling food, but I know where you've been—staring at Skywall till your

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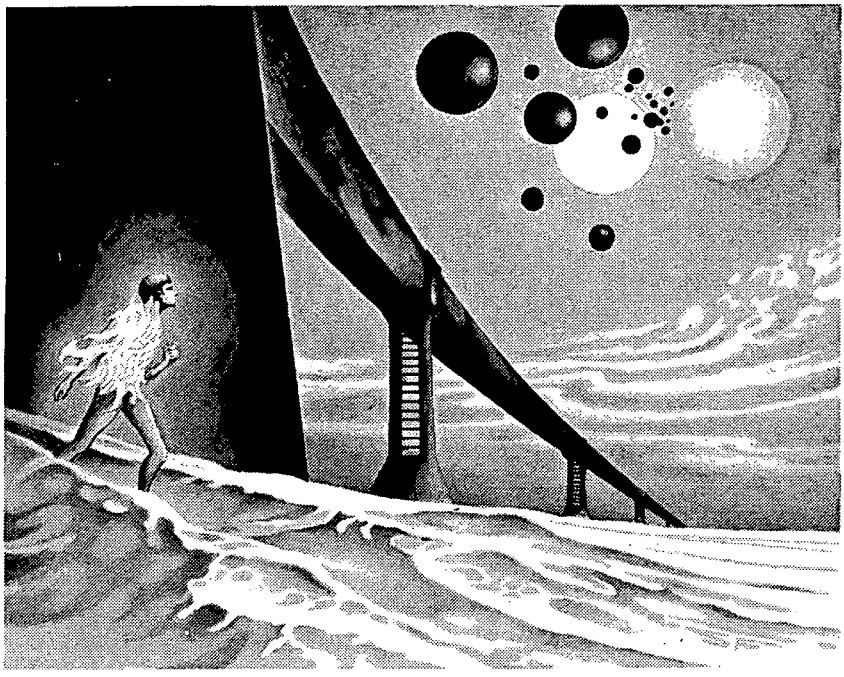

eyes popped out, dreaming about starships." To the workers, "Carry on. We've another load of food before the week's quota is done."

Kelver said, "I have to tell you this, Kaz Ashaki, Village Elder, Master Interpreter—"

His uncle stopped. "Formal, aren't you?"

Listen, will you!'

"No," said Uncle Aaye, preoccupied again. "Not the grain, dolt! This is a meat bale! You want the people inside to get a vitamin deficiency or something?"

Pause.

Kelver watched them shovel.

Then he couldn't stand it any more. He just blurted out, "I saw black bubbles fall from the sky."

There was silence. He felt them watch him. He was the village liar and he knew it. . . .

"Inquestors!" someone shouted. "It must be a coronation!"

"Bah," said Uncle Aaye. "Probably another tax assessment." He was trying very hard to act nonchalant, Kelver saw; but for a mo-

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ment Kelver had seen the fear in his eyes. More kindly, his uncle said, "You all have leave to go and watch."

But he was talking to the air. They had all vanished, dashed down the path to the first displacement plate, out of sight.

Kelver sensed the old man's worry. But he was still burning with the excitement of it. It was the first new thing he'd seen since . . . since his father's corpse. He told him everything. . . .

"What are they, Uncle Aaye? What are they?"

"You haven't guessed?" His uncle looked at the boy for a moment. Then he said, "You dreamer of starships, you . . . they were tachyon bubbles."

Kelver was afraid.

"They are bubbles of realspace," Uncle Aaye went on, "that are shot through the tachyon universe. They are used by the Inquest for instant travel between the stars. Some people say that whole suns die to fuel them. While other folk use the starships that sail the overcosm, and suffer from the disorientations of time dilation, the Inquestors can be anywhere at any time . . . someone in the universe is putting on a show of power, Kelver. A great deal of power. . . . "

But Kelver wasn't listening anymore. He was thinking, *At last, Gallendys, our own planet, is at the center of something important. Maybe even I can get involved—*

A crinkled hand on his shoulder. "The last time the Inquestors came was to command the razing of a city . . . and the decimating of the population. One in ten of our planet, Kevi, painlessly put to death . . . because some distant village had rebelled against the senseless task of feeding the mountain. They said if our planet had been less important they might have annihilated it."

"I'm sorry, uncle! I shouldn't have seen them; maybe I'll be bad luck for all of us now," said Kelver. That was when his father had been killed. He twisted free of his uncle, and turned to watch Skywall, the unchanging blackness.

A whiff of raw meat for a moment, from the foodbales, and then he kicked the bale over onto the plate, pressed the stud, watched it fade away.

"I don't get it," he said. "I mean, uncle, I mean—why are we doing this? Why is the Inquest so important?" There was no reply. He went on, more passionately now, "What gives them the right to do this to us?"

"I thought you wanted to rush out into space and fight the overcosm wars and work for the Inquest!" his uncle said, harshly.

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Kelver thought about it. Something was wrong with the way things were and he didn't know what it was.

He sent another bale of food into the mountain. *I hope you enjoy it,* he thought at the people in the dark country. The people who didn't exist.

"Kevi—"

Kelver reached out and patted his uncle's hand. He was sorry for him sometimes . . . having an unwanted kid thrust on him like this. But today he was something special. Even if it was only a bringer of bad tidings. He had been the first to see the rain of tachyon bubbles. And by nightfall everyone would be talking of nothing else.

They walked back to the house together.

Kelver lay down on the floor; quickly it contoured itself to his body. The whispering upstairs began to crescendo. An argument was starting. "That boy, that boy. . . . "

He'd gone to sleep to the sounds of this lullaby for years, almost as long as he could remember now. . . .

He tried to imagine the new Kingling. Davaryush. In the formal style that would be Ton Davaryush z Gallendaran K'Ning, Inquestor and Kingling.

In the darkness he tried to picture the twin cities of Effelkang and Kallendrang: nothing came to mind. He knew of the towers built upon the towers of towers, but this was just a form of words, he thought. Once or twice he had seen holosculptures . . . but nothing whole, nothing to give an impression of the grandness of it. And descriptions from uncles and elders . . . wind from the desert.

So he closed his eyes and thought of starships. He flung them out into the blackness, zapped them in and out of the overcosm, and started to pound the floor as he lay, so fast it couldn't contour itself in time. . . .

Then he thought, *All the starships in the Dispersal of Man work because of the Inquest.*

The thought chilled him for a moment; but then he lay back and counted starships as they crossed the overcosm in his mind, counted them over and over until he was asleep from exhaustion.

THREE: THE UTOPIA HUNTER

A room in Kallendrang. In the lowest tower of the towers that hung downwards from the sky, almost kissing the pinnacle of the

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topmost tower of Effelkang, that tower built upon the towers of towers.

Invisible towers, too: like the towers of force that kept the twin cities in this opposition, the one mirroring the other, suspended over it, the lower city Effelkang hovering over the Sea of Tulangdaror.

And round room like the deck of a starship. Like the towers', its walls were of force. Now they had been deopaqued to reveal the view.

The view: the Sea of Tulangdaror, paleblue sparkletipped water from horizon to horizon. Water to the west: to the east—even at this distance and despite the curvature of the planet Gallendys—the tip of the Skywall mountain peered; an impossible perspective. A black wall leaping from its shroud of mist from a vague somewhere beyond the horizon. Impressive; there was no mountain like this known through the whole Disperal of Man.

And below: spires of amethyst and chalcedony and azurite and rosequartz and olivine, skyscrapers of metals spattered with porcelain tiles, glass cathedrals sweeping in swooping curves, thin white streets that sutured the city.

And ahead. Hanging spires that echoed the leaping spires. Not a mirror exactly: they were not quite the same city. Here there were hanging ziggurats of stone, veined with vines from Vanjyvel and Ont, the Inquestral Palace; here the streets were the tongues of windows, lancing the sky.

Kallendrang was all jewelled stalactites shrinking into the haze of mid-distance, arrowed by avenues, freckled with hovercars, glitter-rich with the dazzle of the blue and white suns.

And in the room, a man, alone, naked.

Waiting.

He was Ton Davaryush z Gallendaran K'Ning; for over three centuries an Inquestor, for two centuries a hunter of utopias, and now new Kingling of Gallendys. He did not see the view: his eyes, heavy-lidded and heavier with sleeplessness, were closed.

His Inquestral shimmercloak lay dead on the floor beside him. It had been ritually stripped from him and sprinkled with prussic acid. An Inquestor and Kingling must discard his shimmercloak and take a new one to symbolize his role as an anointed ruler; his shimmercloak must be grown from a double-yolked egg.

Some hours before, he had stepped from the tachyon bubble into the room, dissolved the bubble with a subvocalized command. The room had been full then, Inquestors and the local nobility almost mingling. The Inquestors had included Exkandar, his contemporary

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in the seminary. Alkamathdes, a Grand Inquestor who had been his teacher, and others too; their shimmercloaks had swished and swept and glittered and sparkled in the huge chamber.

And then Alkamathdes and broken the egg over his head and they had left him alone, for the standard day before the coronation, to reflect, to let the new shimmercloak grow to maturity upon his body . . . a ritual, meaningless enough.

And tomorrow, more of the same. It would not be tomorrow on this planet, Davaryush remembered: here the days were strange and irregular, what with the complex dancing of the suns. But tomorrow he thought of it still—more meaninglessness. He would drift on a hoverfloat through cheering throngs and smile and cast an ember into the firefountain of Kenongtath that burned at the heart of Effelkang, in the Square of the Delphinoids; then ride the gilded elevator up the tallest of the towers, cross up to Kallendrang in a floater, traverse more cheering throngs, enter the Inquestral Palace, receive the iridium crown upon his head, be bathed in lustral water from the Sea of Tulangdaror, finally possess the multimillennial seat of carved, buttock-prickingly uncomfortable basalt from the mountain of the dark country, smile again—

All this didn't change the facts.

He was in disgrace.

He had been made Kingling simply to render him useless, by an Inquestral Convocation that had been too baffled to dispose of him.

He was a heretic!

It's strange, he thought, *how power moves in the world of the Inquestors. The people below, whose lives are over in a flash, like daydreams, like phantoms—they always think we* are *power, all the power in the Dispersal of Man, a pure quantity. Gods, almost. If they only knew.*

Inquestors have all the answers. Davaryush opened his eyes now, and watched the sea. The broken egg tickled his head. . . . *Inquestors cannot argue amongst themselves, can they? Being an Inquestor strips you of your individuality. You become part of the unchanging ideology, dogma, power. A truth-symbol. A compassion-symbol. A symbol of unity.*

For the universe of the Dispersal of Man is vast, beautiful, terrible.

But Davaryush knew also how lies had become embedded in the image of shining truth . . . he himself had dared to question some of these lies.

He was the most dangerous of all the types of heretics. A heretic from within. And since an heretical Inquestor was an unthinkable

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anomaly, they had designed this elegant solution. To drown him with glory. To imprison him with his own power.

To be a ruler. Not to think.

How many of the commonfolk knew that to be a Kingling was the lowest of the low, the only point of the Inquestral hierarchy that even touched the commonworlds? As this room was the only room of the city of Kallendrang within touching of the topmost spire of Effelkang?

Davaryush relaxed as the threads of the shimmeregg thrust out, intertwined, wove themselves. Already there was a grid of strands criss-crossing his body . . . he watched the city below. It seemed so changeless. . . .

This prison was a subtle one indeed. For Gallendys was a world vital to the survival of the Inquest. And the human race. Here they built starships. Here the giant delphinoid shipminds, carcasses of creatures who were all brain, were soldered into the ships so they could navigate their way through the overcosm. And now men needed ships: for the Overcosm Wars, for the War against the Whispershadows, aliens that had never been seen or heard except from under great billowing veils. . . .

And how could Davaryush do anything that would jeopardize the entire human race? The entire Dispersal with its more than a million worlds? He was a heretic, not a lunatic.

Davaryush admired the trap they had built for him.

And then he thought, desperately, a lonely thought: *But I do believe in utopia, still!*

For that was the nature of Davaryush's heresy.

Time passed: there was nothing but the tickling of the shimmerstrands as they inched across him, weaving; growing. Already the strands blushed pink against the blue, with new life, drawing some nutrients from his waste products and from the air. The growing of a new shimmercloak was a comforting sensation: four times he had felt it before, on reaching a different level of the Inquestral hierarchy.

The first time, now. When he was twelve, an initiate, in a small room facing the power of the Inquest.

You have compassion, Davaryush.

"Yes, father." He had been a veteran of three wars even then. And now was alone, in a room with the Grand Inquestor, whose eyes glared fire and millennial wisdom. Even after three centuries, the memory returned, vivid.

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When you came to kill the condemned criminal, you did not torture him or play with him, as was your right, an essential part of the initiation. You killed him cleanly, in a matter of seconds, slicing him into two congruent parts with your energizer. It was artistically done. But why?

"Father, it was necessary to show skill, not cruelty. I have already killed many people." He feigned assurance; in truth, he needed desperately to relieve himself.

Very well. I name you to the Clan of Ton.

Davaryush started, gasped audibly in spite of his knowledge of the proper conduct . . . he had come expecting to fail, to be returned to homeworld.

The Clan of Ton . . . that would mean seminary, long years on harsh, inhospitable planets, thankless labor for the sake of the Dispersal of Man . . . .

Loneliness.

"Father—"

You are unworthy. I know. Nevertheless, the Inquest takes what it can get.

His first mission was the planet Gom, a hot planet of a blue-white star. The people lived in tall buildings, thousands to a building, fifteen billion to the planet. But they were happy. They were quite ignorant of their responsibilities as a fallen race: they relied on automata, they pursued their hedonistic existence without regard for their true natures. They suffered from the heresy of utopia.

Davaryush was a perceptive utopia hunter; he had found the flaw very easily. Every year, in a special ceremony marked by compulsive gratifications of the senses, all those over the age of fifty intoxicated themselves and then committed suicide, leaping by thousands into the lava lakes that boiled conveniently on every continent.

He'd saved those people. First he had whispered to only a few of them: *and what if you did not die?* He had created civil wars, unhappinesses, revolutions. People ran mad, setting fire to the machines that had succored them. Then the ships of the Inquest came, bringing comfort with them.

Comfort and truth.

But Davaryush had been tempted by happiness then. Alkamathdes, his mentor, said: *Remember, man is a fallen creature, Davaryush. Utopias exist only in the mind, a state to which it is given us to aspire. But to imagine that we have* attained *that state—that is to deny life. The breaking of joy is the beginning of wisdom.*

And after a while he had been no longer tempted. For he saw such

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as the planet Eldereldad, where the happy ones feasted on their own children, which they produced in great litters, by hormonal stimulation; and the planet Xurdeg, where the people smiled, constantly, irritatingly, showing no face except the face of ecstacy, until he had finally learnt that the penalty for grief was dismemberment to feed the hungry demands of the degenerating bodies of five-thousand-year-old patriarchs . . . yet when he asked one of those ancients what he most desired, he had replied: *To feel grief. But I am afraid to die for it.*

When he was a young boy facing his new destiny he had first learnt about lying. Alkamathdes had said: *Never forget the lie. This lie is the sacrifice that you must make, the little sin you will commit for the sake of saving countless millions. It is this: that the Inquest is seeking a perfect utopia. A planet that will be designated a Human Sanctuary, for the edification and glory of the Dispersal of Man. You will tell them that always, and in your heart you will understand always that there will exist one fatal flaw.*

And always, after, the ships of the Inquest would follow him. In a year or so his subjects would awaken to their true natures. Then they would fight wars and exhibit pitilessness and avarice like everyone else. For man was a fallen being. For centuries he had never doubted this.

Until the thirteenth utopia.

Until he came to Shtoma in the cadent lightfall.

A brief night passed.

In the twin cities night and day were hinged to his whim, to his waking and sleeping. The dance of the twin suns had no provenance here; the shields that surrounded the cities could block out, could play holographic landscapes of their own choosing. . . .

When Davaryush woke, a gaudy dawn had dyed the Sea of Tulangdaror. Savage purple streaked the sea.

He woke with a start, rose from the floor. The floor flattened.

His shimmercloak was fullgrown. The dark blue fur blushed, shivers of pink rippling through the living material. He turned; the shimmercloak whipped around, echoing his movement.

Then he saw the dawn. They had sought to copy his homeworld, the lost planet he had not seen in three centuries. Did they think he would feel at home, more secure, then? But time dilation had stranded his homeworld in an unreachable past. Some time *between,* while he sat and watched the fire of the overcosm counting the years like seconds . . . they had obliterated his homeworld. There had

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been some war . . . well, that was what it was like, being an Inquestor. You got an overview. Lives flashed by like the lives of insects.

The dawn pained him, more than he thought it would. Was the Inquest playing a game with him, subjecting him to psychological tortures while he was caught in their trap?

He clapped his hands.

It was the Lady Varuneh who answered his call, materializing in the middle of the room. She came forward, stepped down from the displacement plate, slid gracefully into the required obeisance.

"Lady Varuneh," he said, studying the face, "I want the dawn changed. I want the shields deopaqued so we can look at the real Gallendys all the time. I want to begin my reign honestly, if I can."

The shadow of a smile surfaced on the Lady's face and melded into the mask of humility. "I'll see to it," she said.

She looked about eighty—old for a woman not of the Inquest—and was severely clad in a black tunic with only a wisp of clingfire around her neck and waist.

Suddenly Davaryush thought, *Maybe she's a watchdog of the Inquest.* "Who ordered this dawn?" he said, selecting his coldest Inquestral voice.

"I did." Deceptively simple.

The woman looked straight at him. It was an ugly face, gray-streaked and lined and without cosmetics. Her hair was still black, but parched like a blasted field . . . her eyes were young, blue, powerful. Again the thought that she might be more than she seemed gnawed at him. "Discard the dawn, please."

The woman froze her features for a moment; presumably she had cyberinputs to the buildings themselves.

He remembered from his hypnobriefing who she was: a member of Gallendys' old aristocracy from pre-Inquestral times, now technically a planetary bureaucrat, directress of the shipyards—in practice a kind of court lackey, one who knew her way around the complexities of local protocol and could be expected to know many secrets of many Inquestral rulers.

He didn't like her.

I'll get rid of her as soon as I can, he thought. *Curse her for springing the dawn on me like that!*

Then came an image of his dead homeworld, of his dead parents He was afraid of this woman, too. . . .

Abruptly he turned to look at the Sea. The sky was shattered Shards of the purple light broke off and faded in the painful bright

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ness of the two suns. They had hardly moved, then, since the previous day.

And the towers glistened.

"Your Highness is ready for the official ceremonies of induction and coronation? Shall I inform the court?"

A little stiff, a little hurried, he thought, appraising her by instinct.

"Yes. Yes," he said absently, wishing she would leave.

"I'll inform them—"

What was she dawdling for? She must be a spy of the Inquest, observing him watching for a clue of weakness so that they could close in on him and punish him—

"You may leave."

She rushed towards him then. He put out a hand quickly to ward her off. Then she knelt at his feet and thrust something into his hand. Cool. Flat.

"Kill me if you have to!" she whispered fiercely. "You must be the one!" Then she whirled around and hurled herself onto the displacement plate and faded away.

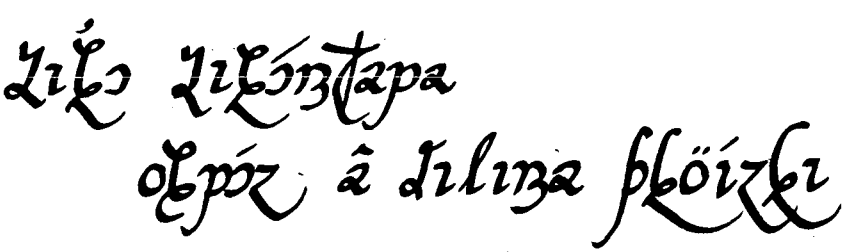
"What is this?" Davaryush cried. And then he stood alone in the huge chamber. It had been an unnerving experience; for a moment he had thought her an assassin.

Then—

He saw that there was a messagedisk in his hand. It was of the crystal parchment that scribes used. It was written in the Inquestral highscript, with a fair, firm hand, but it was not in the highspeech. It was the tongue of Shtoma.

And he knew what it said.

The words were—



qithe qithembara
udres a kilima shtoisti
"Soul, renounce suffering:
You have danced on the face of the sun."

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Davaryush shook. Did the Inquest know then what had happened on Shtoma? Were they only waiting for him to reveal the canker-darkness in his heart?

Even now, Shtoma haunted him. Shtoma in the cadent lightfall. The planet where he had found his own heresy. . . .

Underneath the passage was a message in the hightongue. It was a different hand: nervous, spidery.

We think you are the one who will change the way things have been. To challenge the past. We think you know that utopia may yet exist . . . on the tenth day of the week, come stand by the firefountain of Kenongtath. You will be contacted.

Then the words dissolved. The ink had been timed, giving him a chance to read it only once.

They were all waiting for him to catch the bait, to show that he was still the heretic inside! Gallendys was a trap!

. . . Shtoma in the cadent lightfall. . . .

Could it be that there were human beings somewhere, waiting for him to come as a savior? Could it be that the Lady Varuneh was not a spy, but simply driven by desperation to reveal herself?

Davaryush knew how devious the Inquest could be. . . .

He filed the information carefully, suppressed it with an effort, in case the Inquest had mindhearers planted nearby. And turned his thoughts to the coming ceremonies.

And looked out over the city. The spires, hanging down and pointed up, like the teeth of a monster ready to swallow him. A single false step. . . .

The image of the homeworld dawn crept back into his thoughts for a moment. Then he knew that it had been no accident: it had been planned as a sign for him, to jolt him into an emotionally receptive state perhaps. There was no end to the Inquest's deviousness!

Selfishly, he wanted the mauve dawn back then. He wanted the sky streaked with half-remembered purples and the sea sparkling like liquid amethysts and the green grass tinted black by the sunrise. . . .

Tomorrow he would look into the history of the woman Varuneh. He would find out once and for all who it was who was trying to manipulate him, and why.

The ache of homeworld swelled in him.

Outside, the city glittered.

The trap yawned, waiting.

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FOUR: THE DARK COUNTRY

Girl-before-Naming wasn't human and she knew it. And she knew she could never tell anyone. She knew what would happen.

The dark country. That was what would happen.

She was a girl just past puberty and cursed with a gift that made her not human and she was terribly alone.

Like now. In the family catacomb, she was sitting with her arms folded, not touching the ground, and she *knew* where every object in the room was. Without feeling for the vibrations. Without tapping the floor with her fingers, easing along until they encountered an object, carefully identifying it by its texture, its smell, its taste. . . .

She could feel with her eyes and ears.

Look! The Others-before-Naming in the room were playing ball. Sensing the caress of wind against their faces, reaching out and catching, sometimes stumbling over stray rocks. . . .

She felt the ball come to her with her eyes. She caught it with impossible accuracy. A boy tensed, feeling the sudden stillness of the air. Then he clambered toward her. . . .

He grabbed her arm. *Cheat! Cheat!* he signed, his fingernails rasping her skin . . . she winced, moved away.

I'm not cheating, she signed.

All of them were around her, suffocating her, smelling her and each other to check who they were . . . she felt everything press her in, she felt as though the far dark above would fall on her and crush her. . . .

Wildly she reached out to the first children within grasp and signed—each hand mirroring the other—*let me alone!* With her eyes she felt them pass the message down.

With her ears she felt them leave, through the circular machined opening in the rock. The curve-feel that meant *door.*

It always ended this way. Someone would start to get angry, to sign *cheat, cheat,* and then they would be signing it round and round and she could even feel them sign it with her eyes sometimes, she could make out the finger motions almost, she could almost figure out the code of the eye-feelings; sometimes it blurred for her. But there had to be something to it. . . .

It must be hallucinating, she would think sometimes. Logic said there couldn't be any senses apart from feel, smell, taste. And her eye and ear senses were feeble, shadowy senses, not like the real ones.

Sometimes they worked better than other times. It was in those

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rooms where a diffuse force flowed out of the walls themselves and widened the periphery of her feeling. She never could tell why this was, why some rooms accentuated her strange senses; for there seemed no source to the mysterious undarkness.

Now she pushed herself hard against the jagged wall of rock. Every well-memorized furrow grated on her back. Then she straightened her crotch-shield and tried to smooth down her new breasts, a little worried at them. With her eyes she paced the twelve paces to the other wall.

In a week she'd be normal. . . .

A presence by the round door. A Boy-before-Naming. Her Touch-brother in fact.

He came toward her, inching with his toes, sensing her sweet young girl's smell. Then he sat down in front of her and reached for her arm. . . .

You're a strange girl, he signed. With a twiddle of perplexity, a twist of anger. *The ceremonies of adulthood coming up, so soon, and you still throwing balls with the other children.*

She signed, *I'm scared.*

Why? So they take out your eyes. Useless organs anyway. Nobody has ever figured out what they were ever meant for physically. So we consecrate them to the Windbringers, who are the source of everything. He was signing in neat mechanical strokes—Girl-before-Naming knew he must have just come from his instructor, that he had just memorized another sacred text.

It'll hurt. Of course she did not dare tell him what the eyes really meant to her . . . even now her eyes touched his face and she felt sweat there, almost as clearly as if she had wiped the wetness with her own hands. . . .

Oh, Girl-before-Naming, her Touch-brother signed, *are you a coward even now? How much use will you be on the hunt? When we sail into the thick wind, with our snares laid and the Windbringer's breath flying over us and the windstorms churning?*

(More memorized texts, she thought.) *You know I'm not a coward,* she signed. But her fingers trembled on his palm.

Remember that we are Touch-siblings. Our scent is one. We were so promised at birth. . . .

Somehow she knew that he was frightened too. So she drew him to her in the profane touch that is reserved only for Touch-siblings, and they both drew an awkward comfort from each other. . . .

Touch-siblings, she signed tenderly. *Our scent is one.*

With her eyes she felt the fear on his face. With her ears she felt

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fear escape from his mouth, a windshape piercing the blur of air.

Girl-before-Naming reached the gatherchamber in time for a funeral. The Windriders had come home from the hunt, fifty sleeps long, and three were dead. The whole settlement came to touch the dark ones, some twenty catacombs.

She held hands with a stranger and they began the journey to darkness. The passage to the dark country . . . where the dead went to join the angels . . . was only manwide, and dank-smelling. Girl-before-Naming was hemmed in by the closeness and the breathing of strangers with their unrecognized smells. Once the passageroof scraped her head. They inched their way to darkness—

The dark! The ugliest sign in the language of her tribe.

To be *dark*. To reach out with your arms and touch nothing at all, to stretch out forever and still not reach the rockwall that meant you were still in a real place . . .

Dark is death. Death is dark.

They pressed on. *Slow down,* she signed weakly to the hand that clutched her in front.

A soft fingerpelting sign, repeated over and over in her hand, showed that the hand was the hand of a bereaved one . . .

—muscletwitching as someone stooped for a roofdip—

Then they filed past the bodies of the dark ones. Girl-before-Naming reached out to touch the cold, hard flesh that had become one with stone. The dank smell crammed her nostrils. She was shaking. And she felt the hand of the person in front tighten. The procession hurried on.

They reached the tunnels to the dark country. A man she could feel standing opposite her in the corridor handed her a glove-amp; he slipped it on, stood against the wall, waiting to feel the last rites.

It was Stonewise, her family elder, who signed first. She felt the love tickling her hand; it transcribed the sign into her palm accurately but emotionlessly, so she could not tell what he was thinking. . . .

We say farewell to these as they enter the darkness. We leave them in the dark country where the walls are further than an undark man can walk without going mad from lack of sensation. . . . Angels will come out of the darkness and destroy their human forms. They will become one with the hearts of the Windbringers, they who gave their lives for the life of the Windbringer.

Behind her was a child, breathing as if bored. In front the hand

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of the widow or widower gripped like a sandwich of stone slabs. Girl-before-Naming had been to funerals before . . . but now that it was so near to her own rites of passage, she was tense. *This could happen to me,* she signed in her mind.

And then she thought of losing her eyes. With her eyes she strained to feel something, but that secret sense was dark for her. But with her ears she felt strange windshapes escaping the mouths of the others, stranglesounds that frightened her, that reminded her of the signs for terror and anguish—

Oh Windbringers, we thank you. For your first flight over the empty waters, when you made the humans and the corridors carved of stone. For your second flight over the waters, when you made the secret chambers where the food appears, so that your children would not die or perish into darkness.

From darkness we come; to darkness we return your children. May the angels you have made bear them home, to the chambers of cushioned rocks in the heart of your eternal darkness. . . .

With her hands the widow sobbed, signing the grief-touch over and over.

Windbringers! Windbringers!

Girl-before-Naming lost interest in the ceremony. She began to think of the future. How she must soon sail into the void and help bring home a Windbringer. How she would get a piece of his windsac for a loinpiece and a cutting from his tailflap for a mattress to sleep on, to share with her Touch-brother. There were only two types of people: hunters and waiters. And she already knew—even before the dream that she must have to confirm this—that she would be a hunter. Not for her the waiting at the foodgate for the bales of food that appeared as gifts from the Windbringers, a lifetime of waiting and cleaning the catacomb and being widowed perhaps losing a Touch-brother to the darkness.

Even as she knew this, she was afraid.

The ceremony was coming to an end. The elder Stonewise had pressed the stud that opened the gateway to darkness. Had placed the bodies on ceremonial mattresses woven from the headfeathers of the Windbringer. Had pressed the stud that tipped the bodies into the dark country. . . .

A strange thing happened then. She was nearer the gateway than she had ever been before at other funerals, through some chance or the order of the procession, and—

At the moment the gateway opened, a softness she could not touch flooded her eyes. With her eyes she could touch—

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All the people. She touched them, flicking her eye from one to the other. She touched the knobbly ceiling that was hardly a handspan from her head. And then. . . .

The chain was breaking now. A body or two squeezed past her, children ignoring the etiquette of processions in their rush to get home and eat—

Without warning, the hands that clutched her on both sides were gone. She stood alone for a distance of ten or fifteen paces in either direction, and this glowing softness from the open door bathed her, made her feel lightheaded. It was an eerie thing, this softness.

She took a step toward the gateway. She could feel the whole circle of doorway with the eyes alone. She didn't have to inch along even though the corridor was alien to her.

She stepped out as though it were her own home.

She was at the circular doorway now. She felt with her eyes. . . .

Below—without the real senses she could not judge distance—were the three bodies.

(How tiny they are! she thought. Do people shrink so, when they come to darkness?) She reached out with her eyes. It was one of those caverns that glowed with the quiet, sourceless thing that let her eyes reach farther. (Why is it, she thought, that I can feel so clearly in this darkness, touching nothing at all? Why does it awaken the secret senses so strongly?)

It was still. No wind touched her face. She turned upward.

With her eyes she touched—

Things. Alien. Huge, spidery, glinty-sharp. There was no ceiling it seemed; there her senses were truly dark. But the things up there in the height—

They were coming down towards the bodies!

They were growing bigger, bigger—

She closed her eyes, cursing the secret sense. Then she turned round and began to walk home. Even without touching the door she knew with her ears that it had made a wind of closing. (It can't have been real, she thought. Maybe I dreamed the whole thing.)

Abruptly the softness in her eyes subsided as the wind of closing finished. Things felt familiar again. She groped her way along the wall, reached the receptacle where she laid her discarded glove-amp. . . .

The dank smell came to her, mixed with the empty smell of being alone.

The floor of the preparation room had a cold wetness to it. A trace

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of the perfume of the Windbringer circled in the still air. Drug-drenched steam caressed her face. Girl-before-Naming sat in the center of the room, the walls just out of arms' reach so that they were absorbed into darkness. The idea was to prepare you for the little darkness, the little death through which she must pass in her search for a name and a destiny.

She had been sitting for two sleeps, without food; her only sustenance was a sipper of water over her head. If she strained she could grip the dripnozzle with her lips and get water, a bitter water scented with Windbringer's blood.

She waited.

The steam was so strong that her secret sense was stifled. Her ear-sense was muffled. Her eye sense found darkness as dark as the untouchable walls.

Time stretched. Her head was light. Still the dream eluded her. . . .

She felt a hand on hers. The feeling was a blur, easing into focus . . . a name played on her hand, over and over.

Windstriker.

Father! she signed, only half-believing. *Why have you come?* Under the skinfolds she touched bone, sharp, old. She had not touched her father's hand since . . . thrice three hundred sleeps ago, when she had been consigned like all children to the preparation barracks.

Daughter, you were always special. I had to come. Though I've never come for any of my other children. . . .

She clutched him then, not signing but just letting his love flow into her like a warm wind from the Sound. Through the thick steam, her eyes touched a shadow that could have been his face. Where the eyes should have been, her eyes touched hollows, gouged out, smoothed by age. There was a fear suddenly. She gripped him harder, still not signing.

Not a word for your father?

Slowly she signed, *Love me, Windstriker. Give me strength.*

And then he released her hand.

His touching vanished into the steam.

Hours . . . eons . . . later, in a time beyond counting, another hand came and touched hers. Another old hand. This one felt like a cushion, the bones were deep and well padded.

Cold needles of terror—

Stonewise, she signed. *Power master, elder, interpreter of the Wind,* she signed quickly, using all his titles.

Good, he signed. His fingers were cold.

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She waited for him to begin instruction.

He signed, *And do you know what you will become, daughter?*

She signed, *I do not touch it clearly yet, Stonewise. When I reach out . . . it's like a crystal made of darkness.* She strained to touch him with her eyes but the steam was thicker now; they had intensified it, isolating her even more. There was nothing in her world but the cold floor and the cold hand and the cold cold darkness.

How so? he signed. *You like paradoxes then? You might become a power person like I am, one day. . . .*

I cannot say.

I've fixed a place and a time for your initiation, he signed.

She waited.

Twelve klomets' walk from the farthest catacomb of our village in the direction of the village of the people-who-walk-sideways, there is a door that leads to a bluff that overhangs the great Sound. There you will sit in a darkness more profound even than this one. No hand will touch you. It will seem to you that you have died.

Then out of this darkness that is death but also is soul-before-birthing, out of this chaos of stillness—

Girl-before-Naming shuddered.

—Windbringer will call you. The scent of his spirit will touch your face. His wind will come rushing upon you even at the moment of utmost fear. For Windbringer is our protector, the bringer of life, the taker of life; we live in the touch of the Shadow of Windbringer. . . .

She felt a slow trickling of sweat down the nape of her neck. She recoiled into herself. (It's worse than being born, she thought. . . .)

Power master, she signed, *I'm afraid. Suppose his touch never comes to me?*

You'll die.

And she could smell his indifference. The steam grew stronger. Now she could taste the sour Windbringer blood.

And my Touch-brother? she signed. *The one who is forever linked to me?*

He signed, *Both will die. You dream together, you die together.*

His hand jerked away from her, leaving her in the darkness.

The steam grew hotter, draining the water from her. She reached up with her face and caught the water flow, but the water was sour and almost boiling-hot and did nothing for her thirst. She burned with thirst. The steam came in scalding waves, purging her.

My eyes! My eyes . . .

She thought of Windstriker. Why had he come? Why had he shown such an unnatural affection for her? Everyone knew that a father

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and a daughter must sign to each other only with the utmost formality, lest the intensity of respect boil over and embarrass them both. Suddenly she felt pride in her father. She felt he was different from the others—

Touch-brother was bound to her forever. They were one scent. They were permitted the most profane of liberties with each other's bodies.

But she could never tell him about the touching of eyes and ears. He would mock her forever and call her *Darktouch,* and shy away from her, and his lovemaking would become the caress of a cold machine. They would always be loyal to each other, because the tradition ran deep—soon they would dream together perhaps, perhaps even fall into darkness together.

But he would never understand her special senses.

Her father, though . . . (If I have to get help, I'll have to turn to him, she thought.)

And then, with a rush of despair—

There's no one else! No one!

She beat her fists against her eyes, pounding them, angry with them—

And felt another hand against her breast.

Touch-sister, came the soft sign, intimate and terribly distant.

Brother. Brother. Brother, she signed, but her mind was on the flight of the Windbringer over the vastness of darkness, on the pain of the ritual of the tearing of eyes, on the fear of never coming home.

FIVE: DELPHINOIDS

"To the mainland," Davaryush said.

The Lady Varuneh nodded. The floater soared out over the open sea. It was three standard days since the coronation; it was time to go to work. To inspect the domains of the Kingling.

In the distance behind him Davaryush saw the twin cities, two pyramids joined at the apexes, jewel-clear in the sunlight. He burned all over. The white sun had crossed the face of the blue, and even the waterglare hurt his eyes. . . .

He gave a command. A darkfield englobed them at once; a damp mist of water lightly spiked with the drug *f'ang* blew over the two of them. Through the darkfield the sea had a soft orange-brown luster, and the suns' glare fell to a whisper of light.

He watched the Lady Varuneh.

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Her face, her movements, betrayed nothing of the strange scene that had passed between them three days before. Dignity stood between them like a forceshield.

"Lady Varuneh . . . ".

"Yes, my Lord?"

"You are, theoretically at least, mistress of the shipyards, are you not?" He felt he had to break the silence, if only with repetitions of what he had already learnt. "You do much direct overseeing, then?"

"There's little enough to do." She smiled quickly, remembered her place. "The thinkhives govern everything, of course, Inquestor."

They flew on in silence, the Inquestor brooding, trying to puzzle out the woman. Who gave nothing away. She crouched in a bend of the floor of the floater. Today a scarlet sash, wound tight around the stalkthin waist, dazzled incongruously from the drab robe.

This was the woman who had only three days before placed herself in a position of certain execution.

And put *him* into an impasse: he did not know whether or not to acknowledge the message, whether or not to simply command her removal, whether or not to investigate further.

After some fifty klomets flying over the open sea Davaryush spied land. It was ugly, brown land; only at the sea's edge was there a fringe of green, startling in its way as the Lady Varuneh's sash.

"Ahead," said the Lady, "is the township of Ung Angkier. My own estate is not far from the town center and I hope I may offer you some hospitality—humble as it is—for the midmeal. . . . "

"Where are the shipyards?"

But he saw them now, from the floater's vantage, a roofless labyrinth of low walls, chambers with the husks of klomet-long starships, beyond them a garage of tugs, fifty stories high, beyond them still a town of squat, unremarkable dwellings, mass-molded and repetitive. And specks of people, tiny insects crawling over the high-hulking sunglittering ships. . . .

. . . and the river, enclosed with crystal walls, that ran from the center of the labyrinth and turned sharply in the mid-distance and stretched to the limits of his vision—

In the mid-distance too, at the corner where the river angled out to infinity, began the flat and featureless white clay that was the wasteland of Zhnefftikak.

"Bring down the floater."

They came down, the labyrinth raced towards him and expanded into—

Great walls of stone and steel, five meters tall, and topped with

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lethal field generators that rotated, winking in the sunlight—

The two of them stepped down from the floater.

"There is no reception committee," the Lady Varuneh said as they dismissed the floater and he watched it rise and wait above their heads, making a little shade from the brightness. "I understood you might perhaps want to view the shipyards . . . incognito."

Davaryush looked around. This chamber of the shipyard was at least a klomet square; its walls were low lines, distant. Against a far wall a hull was being erected. No one had observed them; or if they had, had thought nothing of it.

"Look," he said. "No one is watching. What was the meaning of the message?" He saw Varuneh blanch, recover control.

"What do you mean, my Lord?" she said. Then, under her breath: "Just do as it says!"

"You dare command me?" he turned on her, angry.

"I don't presume . . . " she began. Then she said, "If you would care to progress to the next displacement plate. . . ."

They stepped onto the plate and rematerialized—

And he was face to face with a delphinoid shipbrain.

It stretched to left and right for 50 meters and towered high over Davaryush, an ashgray ovoid shape, wrinkle-furrowed, quivering a little. Overhead, huge rotating jets sloshed nutrients over the mass of flesh.

He was not prepared for the wetness of it. Or the slow quivering. He had always known how a starship worked—how there was a delphinoid shipmind that saw through the overcosm, under the control of an astrogator who mindlinked with the ship and became one with it . . . But he always imagined a starship as machinery. Not as a living thing.

He moved nearer. Wondering, he put out his hand and touched—

Slippery. His finger traced a line in the flesh; the line sealed itself up. . . .

He walked the distance of several city streets, and came to where a team of workmen, on a scaffold, were leaning against the brain, working with solder and blowtorch.

"Does it not feel pain?" he said, disturbed.

"How can we know?" the Lady Varuneh said. "How can we dare to know? If they did feel pain, would we halt the advance of the Dispersal of Man, just to assuage the anguish of aliens?" She spoke too quickly, as though making a jest of it . . . but Davaryush caught the twinge of bitterness in her voice. He decided to drop the subject.

"You have many shipyards, Lady Varuneh?"

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"From the world inside the mountain issue perhaps twenty-five of the cold rivers, leading to twenty-five shipyards across the continent. Each shipyard is serviced by perhaps a hundred tribes of the people in the Dark Country, the hunters . . . but the Inquest has not told us who those people are, and why they remain in the mountain. . . ."

"It's not for you to question the Inquest," he said automatically, gazing up at the workmen. They were singing as they drilled passages into the brain and reeled in electrode cables from a crane-held dispenser.

He caught fragments of the words, sung over and over again to a pentatonic melody, hypnotic and sad:

zenzAtheren a Keanis
aias Talassas
aiud lukhs de' skaapnai
z liddar den ypnolan. . . .

They were words in the common form of the hightongue, not in the dialect spoken around Effelkang, not in the shadowspeech of the outlying villages.

"The song they're singing," he said, turning to the Lady Varuneh.

"Ah," she said. "I doubt whether the workers themselves know what they are singing. It's only an old folk song, perhaps as old as when the first Inquestors came to the planet. . . ."

The song went on. The workers hove a big drill into place and then began to unreel more cable, chanting the same strange words. . . .

"On the Sunless Sound," Davaryush translated to himself. *"On the Sighing Sea . . . came light from the Shapers . . . and songs from the Dreamers . . .* what does it mean, Varuneh?"

"How should I know?" she said, twisting away from his gaze.

I shall never understand her, he thought. *Here I'm asking a perfectly innocent question, and—*

He stepped into the shadow of the brain again. Out of the burning into the damp and cool. He looked up; the delphinoid brain curved, the grayness deepened near the top. It was like . . . a sand dune in the desert. A sand dune that breathed.

When they had finished connecting up all the nerves, they would begin to build the ship. Then they would tow it out into orbit; an astrogator, of clan Kail or Harren, probably, would come and link with it and they would burst into the overcosm, where time stood still and ran faster than itself and lights danced maddeningly . . . hundreds of ships a year.

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And those hundreds not nearly enough; were it not for the additional power the Inquest could exert through its control of the tachyon bubble, the Dispersal of Man could hardly be the unit that it was.

And this planet, and these strange people in the mountains, the only way. The brains emerging into the cold rivers, liquid nitrogen encased in a stasis shield that let nothing out, floating slowly towards the shipyards. . . .

There were mysteries here. And Davaryush hungered for knowledge. It was this hunger that had led him into the most powerful clan in the known Galaxy.

"Perhaps . . ." the Lady Varuneh said, breaking into his thoughts, "we should break for a midmeal now, my Lord?"

The atrium of the Varuneh mansion was at first sight blatantly barren—almost self-consciously impoverished.

Davaryush followed the woman and they reclined on the floor. To his astonishment, it did not contour to receive his body.

"Malfunction of the floor mechanism?" he said. "You should have someone from the palace come over and see to it."

"No . . . it's just a personal idiosyncrasy of mine," Lady Varuneh said. "But the floor fabric is silk and stuffed with kyllap leaves—not uncomfortable when you're used to it—"

Davaryush settled himself uneasily. They did not speak for a while. He saw that there was a kind of opulence here, much different from the dazzlerichness affected by the Inquestors in their dwellings. . . .

The atrium wall—which mimicked the ubiquitous white plastic of poor men's dwellings—were actually Ontian marble, etchveined by the firesnows of that violent planet. The cost—

In the center of the atrium a low firefountain played, a liquid rainbow flicker spurting from a base of iridium set with intagliate mandalas highlighted with diamantine crystals.

And above them the sky, filtered and made bearable by a soft darkfield. The glow was almost like—

He flicked aside an image of Shtoma in the cadent lightfall.

Soon there were serfs bringing trays and goblets of sweet zul. Davaryush watched Varuneh eat, very fastidiously, carefully crossing her silver skewers from left to right. She had once been beautiful. Not a doubt of it.

"And do you like our world?" Lady Varuneh said. She managed to slip a note of innocuous mockery into the platitude.

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"I am perplexed," he said. "I don't understand you. I don't know what is going on. I should sit back and let the thinkhives govern, and send in my starship consignments according to the instructions of the Inquest, and be at peace here . . . but I can't. Someone, something is trying to disturb my peace."

He had spoken tactlessly. He should not have dropped his guard in front of this woman, who was perhaps a spy of the Inquest . . . *Perhaps, when she reports this, they'll think I am on to their game. Whatever it is.*

"Isn't that as it should be?" Lady Varuneh said lightly. *"An Inquestor can never rest from thinking; for an Inquestor stands at the center, suffering the necessity of thought for the sake of the salvation of the Dispersal of Man."*

"You know the Inquestral texts!" he cried, startled.

"I have known a great deal in my time, Ton Davaryush z Gallendaran K'Ning," she said.

Davaryush ate.

"And the previous Inquestor who ruled here," he said. "Was he a fair Kingling? Did he oppress his people too much?"

"I was his mistress."

Davaryush watched as she plucked the feathers of a roast jangyll, and laid them one by one in a neat pattern on the tray . . . and offered him the dusky meat, perfectly skewered.

The floater swung upwards toward the sunlight. The twin cities rose into view like crystal stalactites from the water and jewel stalagmites from the roof of the sky. . . .

"I know," said Lady Varuneh, "you are thinking of Shtoma."

Angrily, Davaryush cried out, "How can you know that? How dare you know anything?"

A light wind, salt-scented and damp, had permeated the darkfield and played with a few strands of Varuneh's hair, white-streaked and flax-textured . . . ahead was the gate to Kallendrang, a diamond-shaped barrier set into the invisible forceshields. And behind, still distance-misted, the twin cities. The sky-foundations of Kallendrang disappearing into wisps of cloud. Mirrorspeckle windows twinkling like tiny stars. . . .

In her way, the Lady Varuneh was still beautiful. A woman weathered and worn smooth by time. . . .

Slowly he said, "If you wish, you can restore the programming of the city's forceshield, have it replay the dawn from my homeworld, mornings." Vaguely he sensed that she had won some kind of victory.

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They were playing a colossal game of *makrugh,* the Inquestral game of strategy and control; and the mysterious woman was gaining ground . . . he watched her.

The woman had no right to know so much about his past. She must be an enemy. And yet he found himself drawn to her, as an insect of the night towards the flame.

The false dawn pleased his eyes that morning. He breakfasted alone; then went to the audience chamber and issued some harmless routine decrees. He requisitioned a certain percentage of starships for the planet Keima—it seemed to be at the forefront of a new war. War was a game the Inquestors played at constantly; for most could not be satisfied with the *makrugh* of computers and boards and metal tokens. And of course, war honed the human animal for the good things of life. So it was prescribed in the Inquestors' ideology; and so he had always believed, until Shtoma.

Davaryush found the city's thinkhive in a small chamber of the Palace that had no windows. It was a room without curves, perfectly cubical, and walled with mirror metal. He entered, seeking answers—

"What," he said, "is the real reason for this planet's existence?"

To serve the Inquest. The voice echoed in his head. The thinkhive had access to all knowledge on the planet. But one must ask the right questions; for it was wily as an Inquestor, and yielded nothing until it had judged the questioner thoroughly.

"Why is it that the people on this planet—with the exception of the twin cities' population, who are all civil servants and bound to the Inquest—are in such a state of technological backwardness? Beyond the shipyards of Ung Angkier, the displacement plates come to an end. There are villages, each one stranded in the shadow of the dark mountain—"

Come, come, Davaryush! What are you driving at? You know as well as I do that it is to the Inquest's advantage for planets of such critical importance as this one to be kept in ignorance. How would it be, if one world could hold an entire Galactic community to ransom?

"Tell me then why so little is known about the way the delphinoid shipminds are harvested and brought into the shipyards."

Everything is known, Davaryush. You haven't asked, that's all.

"So tell me."

In the mountains there is a culture of blind and deaf people, so mutated by the Inquest at the beginning of the period of Inquestral power. They hunt the delphinoids, thrust the brains into the cold

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rivers . . . their whole culture, their whole mythos, was manufactured by the Inquest. Their lives center around the capture of delphinoids; they have no time even for foodgathering. Nor can food grow in the emptiness of the dark country. So the Inquest created villages of feeders who supply them with food. But in the mythos of the dark country, it is the gods, the delphinoids, who supply everything.

"But why are they deaf and blind?"

It is not in your interest for me to supply this information.

Davaryush felt cold fear then. He gathered his shimmercloak about his shoulders, even though the cold came from the inside and not from the perfectly controlled weathermakers of the cities. A thinkhive could not contradict an Inquestor, not unless . . . there was a truth here that gnawed at the very roots of the way things were.

But it's all very clever, Davaryush. For instance . . . just in case there are genetic throwbacks, the mythos contains a puberty ceremony that involves eye-gouging. No sighted person could possibly remain. . . .

"And if—" Davaryush stopped to frame his question carefully. "And if one of the people in the dark country should escape?"

It's impossible.

"All right. I know that between here and the dark country there is an impassable desert. I know it's populated with *al'ksigarkar,* fanged creatures who eat flesh. I know there are stone-age men in the wasteland too, planted there for the sake of separating the civilized cities from the rest of the planet. But also we've had no contact with the people of the dark country for twenty thousand years, isn't that so? Couldn't some development occur—"

Davaryush, Davaryush. Do you think I don't see into the very heart of the dark country? That the Inquest did not provide me with eyes and ears even over the winds of Keian zenzAtheren?

"I suppose so," Davaryush said.

And besides—the voice of the thinkhive continued—*there are other built-in safety measures. For example: in the caverns where the dark people dispose of their dead, set into the cavern roofs, are robot drones. Their function is mainly to clean and vaporize the bodies and dispose of the organic slush, which sluices into the Sound and becomes part of the amino acid soup which the delphinoids eat . . . These drones have another function also, one that has not been exercised in twenty thousand years.*

"And that is?"

If someone should escape from the dark country, the drones will

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follow, hunt down, kill.

"The Inquest is very thorough," said Davaryush, admiration tempering his distaste.

I am very thorough, the thinkhive corrected. *Although the instructions of the Inquest left little room for error.*

For instance . . . I was entrusted with the creation of the dark people's sign language. I was very clever with it. Do you know what word I gave for the drones who come and dispose of the dead, the drones who would chase and terminate any escapers?

"I couldn't guess," Davaryush said. He started to leave.

The thinkhive said: *The drones are called . . . it translates as "angels," I suppose. Isn't that funny? In a sardonic sort of way, I mean. Oh yes, the Inquest gave me quite an appreciation for semantic niceties.*

SIX: TO TOUCH THE LONELY WIND

Still fog. Hot damp gusts of aloneness. And darkness, except for the patch of floor that Girl-before-Naming sat on.

After a time she could not estimate, Stonewise touched her lightly, waking her from the light trance. He held her hand as she rose, giddy with the intoxicating scent of steam laced with Windbringer's gall . . . *Quick, quick,* he signed.

What is it? Should I go over to the bluff now? she signed feebly.

No. Come with me. They are sending Windbringer home.

Girl-before-Naming crept after the old one, her hand resting lightly on his back. Her eyes had crusted with the chemicals in the steam; they could not touch through the darkness. And her ears were clogged.

After a while she felt the fog disperse. Now they were in a narrow corridor; her fingertips brushed against slickwet walls, grainy basalt. It was a passageway not often trod; for even after all the years the tribe had lived in this section of the caverns, the floor was rough and rubbed against the calluses of her feet.

Please wait for me, she signed on the old man's back. The skin felt like old leather from a Windbringer's hide . . . they said the old man slept on hide ten Windbringers thick, he was so wise and so old.

They took many turns. The corridor twisted like the tail of a Windbringer when it is first struck by the stunspears. . . .

And then she smelled wide space, and she knew by the gentle

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touch of a wind that she was in a vast chamber. And her ears, with the liquid drying from them, began to touch brittle windshapes that echoed round and round, as though rocks were falling far away. Her eyes were still crusted though; so she could not touch with them the gathering of people whose many odors she could smell on the soft wind. Many strangers. Young people, by the scent; other children-before-naming, soon to be initiated and to learn their identities and the paths of their future.

Suddenly a hand behind her crotch-shield, stroking her in a profane place. A throb shook her—

Touch-brother's fingers laughed against her skin. Dry fingers slipping on her steamslicked back. She reached behind and smiled on his chest with the palm of her hand. His scent touched her nostrils, sweet and familiar.

Glove-amps were being handed out.

Then, the tickling touch of Stonewise as he addressed them all through the glove-amp's circuitry. . . .

—Before Windbringer returns to the fragrant places above the darkness, and reaches the home whence he sprang, we will touch him—

Through her filmed eyes, Girl-before-Naming touched a shadow-vast touchshape. Stretching on either side further than eye could feel. And when she raised her head she could feel no end to it.

It quivered slowly as her eyes touched it, although the wind was subdued and could not have caused the quivering. It was alive. It was the brain of the Windbringer, a hundred meters long, shorn from its sailsacs, plunged into the hunters' forcenets, returning to its high home beyond the darkness—

We will touch him, all together. You will all gain strength from this, for your respective trials, for the seekings after true dreams. . . .

(So the chamber must indeed be huge, she thought. To contain Windbringer himself, to be a way-station on its journey to the land of angels.) Awe crept over her like a child's fear of the dark, of not-feeling.

—Now I activate all the glove-amps, not just in the direction of teaching, but in the direction of communion. And you must know that when you are people-with-names, and have truly become part of the living, you will return here often, and draw spiritual strength from the Windbringer who is at the root of our being—

She felt Touch-brother's hand tighten on hers. (Yes, she thought, it's clear that *I'm* going to be the hunter of us two. He's more afraid than I am, more fit to wait and gather the food that appears out of the empty air, than to swoop through darkness in a little airboat. . . .)

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She clutched him. (I must be strong.)

—*Now reach out*—

Hesitantly she released Touch-brother's hand and stretched out to touch the flesh of Windbringer.

And flinched at the unexpected heat. Then reached out again—

Explored a furrow in the softness—warm, warm—a homewarmth almost, a—love—

Then the touchings of the others invaded the feeling in her hands.

A hundred crevasses of warmth. A hundred touching hands, linked together, together, caressing the soft warm, and there was no darkness here at all but touching everyone everywhere, the surface of Windbringer a warmth dispelling darkness—

And with her ears she felt ecstatic windshapes that flew from the lips of the Others-before-Naming—

They were warm together, warm as love is warm, warm as the touching of touch-siblings is the ultimate warmth—

—*Retract!*—

It broke. There was an ache, as dead and dark as the communion had been. One glove-amp fell from her hand. She reached out for someone, anyone. And caught her Touch-brother, trembling. Groping, she found the glove-amp.

Through it she felt Stonewise's hand on the cool stud in the wall that would send Windbringer home.

And then her eyes touched emptiness. She could not believe that her secret sense had lied, so she flailed the empty air with her hands. Empty, empty, empty . . . Windbringer had returned to his home in glory, in warmth, in the fragrance of angels.

Go, said Stonewise. *In a few sleeps you will all go out to touch the lonely wind. And you will dream or die.*

Girl-before-Naming found herself—without quite knowing how she'd gotten there—in a corridor she had not trodden since little-girlhood, years before her womanblood had flowed for the first time. It was the way to her parents' private catacomb, only a little distance from her own but separated by tradition and the need for high respect . . . she knew she should not go, not but a few sleeps from her destiny, but she could not help herself. She remembered it as a warm dry place and indeed it still was. The walls were close together, so that she could tap them both by spreading her elbows a little. Her elbows remembered furrows in the rock where before she had had to stand arms outstretched to touch them. And now the roof brushed her hair sometimes, making her bob her head. She

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loved the smell of this corridor more than anything. It was the earliest smell she could remember. . . .

And reached out to touch the arms of Windstriker.

Father, father, she signed, an intimate touch that defied convention, so that he recoiled for a moment. Then—his emotions overcoming his regard for custom, he embraced her, and neither of them was embarrassed, both clung with a hunger uncommon in a father and daughter.

(She thought: Since mother died he has been like this. It isn't good for two touch-siblings both to be hunters. It isn't natural. My parents were strange ones. . . .)

She broke away from him. With her eyes she touched the walls of the small chamber. Her father lived here alone now. He gathered his own food. And he still went on the hunt, and still maintained an airboat ready for the Windbringers. He was a true brave one, that man; on the death of his touch-sister he had pledged himself to die in the arms of Windbringer. He would hunt with a divine fury, he would vent his sorrow on the wind over the Sound. She admired him. And now she felt a surge of love for him. But she did not dare touch him again, after the moment of unforeseen intimacy, because she had overstepped the bounds of proper respect. . . .

Why have you come, Tickle? he asked her as though she were a child.

She felt no anger at this. Then she signed, slyly, *You came to see me too, Windstriker, when I was in the preparation room. I didn't expect that.*

Yes, he signed, with a twinge of ambiguity.

Father, I'm afraid! she signed. (There I go again, she thought, uttering the word *father, father* as though it were not too sacred a bond to utter so lightly—)

He touched her face. For a moment she thought he would embrace her again. But she knew better, in time; and the hand drifted to her own hand, to a distance proper for two people bound by such a wonder, by birth and by death. *Everyone goes through it,* he signed.

And then he lifted her hands and placed them over the sockets of his eyes, and she felt the emptiness and the roughness of scar tissue, but before that she had already touched his eyes with her eyes and touched the touchless holes that marked his mastery of childhood—

If I should somehow . . . do something different, father, his hand flinched as she signed the word again, but came back at once, to reassure and warm her, *if I should not find what I'm supposed to*

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find . . . you have to help me. That's why I'm here.

You have your touch-sibling. She felt the regret in his signing, and knew that he still remembered his touch-sibling and still-yearned for her. . . .

Father—Windstriker—my touch-brother is bound to me by scent and loyalty. But we are bound by birth and death. You are the only person I love, Windstriker. (Shall I tell him now? Shall I. . . .)

Her eyes touched the body of Windstriker. Hard. Lean. Smooth as though the wind from the Sound had worn it down. And then he took her hand and signed, *You're a strange girl. If you need me, I'll be here.*

Abruptly she turned round and groped for the entrance. For she knew that if she stayed for another moment, she could not refrain from throwing herself at him again. It was unseemly for a girl past her first blood, on the brink of becoming a woman, on the brink of bringing her eyes to the Windbringer, perhaps on the brink of death. She knew that a good father must not seem to grieve for a daughter about to brave the lonely wind. As she stood at the entrance, back turned to him, his fragrance, an oily mansmell, touched her and she breathed it deeply, feeling not shame but pride, that a man with a hundred hunts behind him, a man pledged to die in the hunt, a man practically an angel—could still find it in him to touch his daughter. And to care for her. He did not need to carry himself arrogantly like a boy who has returned from a single hunt. He knew who he was.

The pride lifted her up like a buoy in the wind currents, rising in the Windbringer's wake. . . .

For a few more steps.

She had not gone twenty meters when she collided with some young children. . . .

Play ball? one of them signed.

She reached out and felt matted hair, soft face speckled with grimecrusts . . . it was her own brother, a boy hundreds of sleeps before-naming.

All right, she signed. A twinge of longing for lost childhood—

You'll cheat.

No. No.

They squatted in the corridor that had opened out a little and he handed her the ball, a dry leathery thing patched together from scraps of Windbringer hide. She threw it to him. He waited for the ball's windtouch, then snatched it skillfully out of the darkness. Then she felt the wind change, felt him throw it to some other child

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—Ball, rushing toward the touch of her eyes—

She caught it. At once they were clustered around her. *How did you do that? How?*

I touched it beyond the darkness, she signed angrily.

Hah! Darktoucher! Liar! No one can do that. . . .

(Not again, Girl-before-Naming thought.) Rubbing her hands on her face in exasperation, she got up and left the children. (Anyway, she thought, I'm too old for that now. Too old. . . .)

She made her way toward the preparation chamber.

From the sayings of Stonewise, who heard them from the signs of his grandfathers and down from the earliest men, and from dreams and portents brought him by the lonely wind—

Our darkness is not really darkness. When the angels have carried us home we will perceive as one with the Windbringers.

The world is the belly of a cosmic Windbringer that courses through an infinite darkness. Who knows? In the vastness outside there may be other Windbringers carrying little worlds of their own, with their own special fragrances, their own textures, their own warmths. . . .

This is how the world was created. First the Sound was distilled out of the darkness. So wet and dry were the first sensations to be distinguished. There was not even warm or cold then. These things were dark to the touch. Then the first Windbringer rose from the Sound. He hovered over the waters, and when he moved the wind sprang up. And then the Windbringer immolated himself. This is the supreme mystery of nature, the act of love that unlocked the universe. His body shattered and the shards that were flung the farthest became hard walls of of rock. His bursting breath became the warmth that burned and boiled the water of the Sound; and his blood mingled with the water, and the warmth of his breath incubated the blood and water as a mother's womb a little child unborn. And so men and women rose from the water. There was a terrible darkness and they were afraid. But the force of Windbringer's bursting blew them onto the rocks and then they touched cold as well as warmth, and knew the difference between life and death. And out of the same substance were born the Windbringer's children who fly the thick winds over the Sound. Who make the food appear on the floors of metal. Man and Windbringer are as touch-sibling and touch-sibling, then. . . .

And the wings of Windbringer became the angels.

For seven long sleeps she sat in the chamber, the damp ground the only respite from darkness. For seven sleeps the gall-soaked

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steam penetrated her pores and drew the sweat from her, and she did not eat. She went beyond the dull ache of hunger into a kind of euphoria. She sat and her fingers danced laughter on the hard ground.

They came for her. Her eyes were crusted over. Her ears too. Her lips were crusted and parched in spite of the steam and sweat. Giddy, she rose and followed the one they had sent for her, a stranger cloaked completely in Windbringer's hide so that she could not identify him, so that where the scent of a human should come there was yet more darkness. She followed him quickly. The feel of the hide instead of flesh on the stranger's back filled her with heartpounding unease. She signed nothing, but followed. Her eyes could not touch beyond the crusts.

Quick, the stranger signed with a gloved hand. The signing was cold, emotionless.

She followed him out of the preparation chamber. They took a turning she did not recall having felt before. She stumbled. The stranger's pace didn't slacken. *Quick, quick,* he signed, and thrust further into darkness.

I don't—Dizziness. Faintness. She felt her legs could hardly carry her. Still he hastened her. Her fingers barely skimmed the coarse leather before he moved on. (He knows this way thoroughly, she thought. Why have I never seen it?) It was a path riddled with pocks and stones that stung her feet. She smarted and moved on. This passage must be used very rarely if the floor could still hurt so much. . . .

Another chamber. And she was released into the arms of her Touch-brother.

Tired. . . .

Be still, be still, he signed. *We have to make ourselves still inside.* He hugged her close. Then he drew soft circles on her palms with his fingertips. Then he touched her breasts, but without urgency. She felt an involuntary lifting in them, but her mind was elsewhere.

The dream, she signed. So he would stop. *This isn't the time.*

Yes. We go.

The stranger seized them roughly by their wrists. *You will walk on this path,* he signed. *For some distance yet. You will walk separately, without touching. When you reach the appointed ledge overhanging the Sound they will prepare you. Now find yourselves. If within three sleeps you do not return we will mourn for you, but we will also rejoice with you for your return to the home of Windbringer—*

The hand broke away quickly.

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They walked on. She might as well have been alone. Her feet touched sharpness, stumblestones, teeth jutting from rock. She walked on. Her feet bled.

She collided with him at one point. Quickly she made a sign of aversion, but not before he had signed sadly, *You are dark to the touch, Touch-sister.* She walked on. Her feet glued themselves to the rock, the blood and sweat were like glue, she had to drag herself onward. Hunger ate away at her innards. How long now? She trudged, throwing aside the hunger and pain . . .

And presently the hunger subsided. The pain became more like joy. The pain itself became warm. She marvelled at this, but she was too tired to think for long. And presently—

Her ears picked up a windshape in the distance. A windshape of anguish, of a distant seething—

The big wind hit her all at once.

She was on the ledge now. Her eyes were clearing, and with them she touched her touch-brother standing a few meters away. And now she set her face against the wind.

The wind pinned her against the wall. She resisted. She thrashed, hard, against it, but it pushed her relentlessly. And the windshape rose and fell like the windshapes that escaped the lips of the dying—

Be strong be strong, she signed against her body, and she could hardly move her arms to sign against the windtide—

Darkness itself was alive! She tried to break free. To brave the lonely wind, to run further out on the ledge—

And pried herself from the wall! And now she stepped out, and the wind battered her from all sides and the howling windshapes came like ghosts of the dead crowding her breathing on her and she took another step and she was cut loose from all the hardness except for the patch of hard rock that she stood on and all around the darkness raged howlshape after howlshape the hairstream slapping her cheeks—

Another step—

(I am alone here. I will touch with the hands of my mind now. I will touch with the hands of my heart, through the barrier of wind and darkness.)

Howlshapes gathered hurricane-eyed tempested stormed—

(I will send out the hands of my heart and they will touch the truth.)

More steps now. Each step prouder. For she was the daughter of Windstriker who had braved the wind a hundred times and wrested the heart of Windbringer from the heart of darkness.

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(I will know who I am)

And in the wind a fragrance: the fragrance of a distant Windbringer. She knew it not from experience of wild Windbringers but as though from a memory implanted in her before birth. A womb-memory—

She breasted the big wind.

Her feet were her only contact with her past. And when she lifted one foot the wind soared burned past tore her along like a dust-speck—

(Reach! Reach!) And her hands stretched out like one-who-walks-when-sleeping.

Now her secret senses became dark, even though the crusts were long blown from her eyes. Only her ears registered the windshape that roared in anger and terrible anguish—

In her mind she stretched her arm out to the heart of the world, the center over the Sound and further and further and still her mind reached no wall on the other side and still the wind battered her and still she walked out, tottering but still erect—

A vibration in her mind now, like a divine word-signing

LIFT UP YOUR HEAD

It was a touch from within. Almost as though another person was there with her. The sting-tang streamed over her eyes. She had to close them, they smarted, the wind was pushing at them, she had to

LIFT UP YOUR HEAD

and then she forced them open and sent the touching of her eyes far far far out into the ends of darkness and then they touched

An undark.

For a moment it seemed that the wind had become frozen. Beyond darkness her eyes had touched a new thing.

An undark.

(How? she thought wildly. How can the darkness part so, and this pattern of undark-that-I-have-no-name-for play over the darkness like a mother warming a newborn child?)

And then she knew that she had perceived something that had never been perceived before. There was no answer in the words of the old myths of the fingerchants. Or in the truth-telling dreams that visited Stonewise the knower.

And she had done it with her eyes.

In the impossible distance the undark played. The undark glimmered like a memory that surfaces and is gone before it can be recalled. . . .

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And then she knew that a terrible thing had happened. Because of this she must not lose her eyes. The gift that she had was not a useless aberration that let her catch balls from gullible children and let her pick the pebbles out of her path before they bit into her foot. The gift—

(But will they understand? No! They'll throw me into the dark country and the angels will get me before my time—)

And then she remembered the glinty-sharp things that had fallen upon the corpses and devoured them . . . *they* were the angels. They were *machines*.

And the undark came again, this time with a different—scent? texture? what was the name for the textures of undarkness?

And her heart was stopped with the beauty of it.

Though it was but the edge of some greater beauty beyond her grasp.

Then the darkness swallowed the undark. The winds seemed to return. But she did not fear them now. She had touched beyond the wind.

(I'm not a girl anymore. And I must have a name.)

Then she felt the touches of the children in her mind saying *cheater darktoucher liar* laughing at her mocking at her claims—

(I am a woman. The daughter of great hunters. I will never run away. Even Windbringer will not make me flee.)

—windroar—

(I will embrace the name of cheat! I will be named *Darktouch!)*

Then Darktouch wiped the water from her eyes and turned her back, rebuffing the big wind, and her hands laughed at the hungry spirits of the dead that hovered in the wind to suck away the spirits of those who cannot dream. . . .

Darktouch! she signed on her body. And surrounded the sign with a circle of bitterness and a skinrasping square of scorn.

The wind blew her into the wall. She groped her way along it until she found her touch-brother sitting patiently braving the wind. She touched him gently.

Are you the dream? he signed. *Are you the thing I'm seeking?*

There is no dream, she signed. *What I have found is beyond all dreaming.* And then she started to tell him of the undark and of her name and of her power to touch through darkness.

He shook with fear. Then he signed, *You can't do this to me! The darkness has driven you crazy!*

Then she knew how terrible this thing was. Even her touch-sibling could not understand. How could he understand that she must never

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lose her eyes? How could he understand that this was not shirking adulthood, but embracing it in a new dark way?

(I know who I must go to now, she thought then.)

As the lonely wind touched her she thought of Windstriker. He was the only person she could turn to. . . .

(At least he knows who he is!)

The lonely wind beat at them as a mother beats her breasts when she has lost all her children to the wrath of Windbringer. But Darktouch was too tired for fear now, and too tired to feel compassion for Touch-brother, for Boy-before-Naming whom she had left behind.

Darktouch dashed panting till she found the old corridors with the old panging scents that signed her dead childhood to her mind—

Father! Father!

He recoiled from her. To ward off the darkness that still must cling to her, after the long touching of the lonely wind.

(She thought: We should not sign to each other at all, not until eight sleeps have passed. I am untouchable. . . .)

Father!

She smelled touched sweat, a bloodvessel pulsing between his thumb and forefinger, the hand trying to be firm.

Then, strong and compassionate: *Has the darkness driven you mad, daughter? Will you go to die now, to join with Windbringer in eternity?*

She felt him become very still. His hand had become dead. Whether from astonishment or repugnance he could not tell. Was he steeling himself to reject her, so that he would feel no pain when they cast her into the dark country?

I have a new name now, she signed softly. *I am Darktouch.*

His fingers rasped her skin. *This is a cruel jest!*

No, Windstriker. Her signing had switched to the formal mode and she no longer called him father. She did not wish to pain him by reminding him of a relationship which he must perhaps repudiate. . . .

Windstriker, I have dreamed a dream. In the dream was a truth that Stonewise even doesn't know. There is a thing undark, that lives behind the wind.

Darktouch—he scrawled the unfamiliar name slowly. But she felt a wary exultation, that he had recognized her right to bear the name, no matter how strange. She was proud of her father, breaker of tradition, no matter what.

Touch, Windstriker. At the edge of the reach of my eyes, I touched the dark and there was the shadow of an undark. There is a new

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Great Mystery, maybe greater than Windbringer himself. There's power in my eyes, Windstriker! And a purpose, too. Maybe a power we could all have or all have had once. I have to keep my eyes, Windstriker! Perhaps I will have to lead our people towards the undark. Perhaps there must be a changing of the way things are. . . .

I don't understand, signed Windstriker.

A pause.

Then with a strong motion he clasped her to him, almost crushed her, and she felt his sweat all warm against her and still he was dark to the touch, immeasurably dark, and then he signed against her, cradling her still, *Darkness has driven you mad, you poor child.*

No! No! She touched him with her eyes then. She touched the holes where his eyes had been torn, touched the old scars. And she imagined she saw tears, wrenched from the old sockets, like a baby's . . . (He loves me, she thought. I can still get through to him.) She broke free from him and backed slowly away, still keeping her hands clasped in his.

Then she wriggled them loose, bent over, touched the floor with her eyes, picked up a small flat stone.

She pressed it into his hands.

I want you, she signed, *to walk away from me in a dark direction, calling no windshapes with your feet. I want you to throw the stone. . . .*

Puzzled, he went.

With her eyes she touched the hard rock, her ears caught the zing of the windshape slicing the airstream—

She reached out and caught the stone.

I have caught it. With my ears and eyes alone. She signed the words to him slowly, so that he would know precisely what she meant, the words that seemed to make no sense. . . .

You're my daughter, he signed at last. The words rasped harshly, they had been wrung from him. *I must accept this thing, because my own hands have felt it. I must believe that my own offspring—is something not quite human!*

You must see now, Windstriker, you must protect me! She had thrown all caution aside and was touching him all over now, his hands, his sweat-drenched chest where her eyes touched tufts of curly hair. *We're linked by birth and death, not just by scent and loyalty! Remember your touch-sister, my mother, who died for what she was!*

He signed nothing for a long time. Then: *It seems that I am to be the first that you will lead beyond darkness.*

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But his saying was dark to the touch.

She waited for him to go on.

You have done a terrible thing, he signed, *to remind me of your mother. Remember that for her sake I have vowed to die in the arms of the wind. . . .*

Darktouch embraced her father. She felt sadness shake him, and felt pride in him, that he had expressed emotion and not hidden under a mask of traditions. (Yes, she thought: Windstriker knows who he is. . . .)

You'll protect my eyes?

I'll do the only thing I can, he signed resolutely. *Once they find you gone from the ledge, they will assume that you have failed the test of the lonely wind. Then they will send you to the dark country. So you must come with me now.*

Father, where?

He stiffened. The signing came slowly: *Another great hunt is beginning. I will take you with me in my airboat. You've broken so many traditions already, maybe your eyes can come in useful. Maybe you will touch the Windbringer before even our sensors can.*

Darktouch signed, *And then they will assume I'm lost, by the time the expedition returns, and then we can slip away to another village, perhaps, begin anew—*

I have made my vow to the Windbringer, her father signed coldly. *As you have found the way you must follow, whatever the cost, so also I. You and I are alike in this . . . more alike, at times, than I would have wished, strange daughter . . . it seems that your path leads to banishment, to strange new perceptions. Perhaps they are hallucinations, perhaps something real and important. I have a path too—and it leads only to one thing: to the arms of Windbringer, to the fragrance of eternity.*

Then Darktouch shook his hands away from hers, so that she was isolated from him, in her own private darkness. (Why can't I be a girlchild again? Why can't I be a girl-before-naming? she thought.)

She dried her tears with her long hair, knowing that it was no longer proper to behave like a young girl who did not know who she was. For she had a name now, and a proud father who bore his name meaningfully, so that it was no mere arbitrary twiddle of fingernail upon palm. . . .

She wanted to reach out to him. She wanted him to touch her and stroke her cheek and call her his Tickle. But she had no right to inflict her childish fears upon him. He had dedicated himself to the wind, and had become more important than any new-named girl's

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private anguish. He was almost already a whisper of wind, an arm of the tempest.

Stonewise had said: *The wind touches everything, but the love of the wind is like fire, like acid, consuming everything but the soul.*

She flicked her head around, maintaining the touch through her eyes. Without feeling him, she knew—

Windstriker had bent over, squatted by the wall, felt for the stud that opened the stone larder . . . and taken out four or five sheets of dried meat, two round loaves of bread fresh from the materializing room. Then he reached for the larder spigot and filled two nipple-flasks with water that was mixed with essence of Windbringer fragrance. Without signing to her he handed her the food. Then he placed her hand on his so she could feel what he was doing. She shook him off. He signed, dejectedly, *Whatever. If you claim to perceive without touching.*

He wrapped up half the food in a kerchief of woven Windbringer bark; she copied his movements. He motioned her to follow him, his hand just grazing hers. His emotions were dark now. She knew they were focused on the hunt. The hunt was everything now. The rhythms of children's fingerchants pounded in her mind . . . she knew that to interfere would break his concentration, shatter the power inside him. The power to face the big darkness, alone, in a precarious airboat, isolated from all the others, navigating by the windtouch and the patterns of fragrances. . . .

Come.

He had pressed a stud. She felt a vibrating against her feet. She cast her eyes down and touched an opening. And a shadow of undark, a vague reflection of the thing she had touched in her dreaming.

Put one foot in front of the other. Slowly. He signed without any emotion. She might have been any apprentice hunter, fresh from the dreamseeking. . . .

The thought of Touch-sibling crossed her mind. He must still be out there. Waiting for what could only be half a dream. She imagined the big wind on him, tormenting him, and knew he did not have the strength to rebuff it alone. . . .

(*But I must be what I am,* she told herself fiercely.) She etched the words again and again on her arms, and they stung long after her nails had ceased their raking.

In the dim undark her eyes touched steps.

Her father's body had already shortened, and he stepped into the descending passageway. She followed dumbly. The way was quite

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new to her.

The steps steepened, then ended. Her hand skimmed the passage walls. Smooth, unearthly smooth. Stealing the warmth from her fingertips. They were metal, then, not man-made, not hollowed from rock as man-made corridors were; these walls had been there since the world began. Her hand flinched away. But the chill stung them still, and she knew it for a chill of the heart. This passageway was sacred, and for the touch of hunters only, and a girl with her eyes intact should not, could not—it was violation of the worst kind—

Her mind touched the wind that waited at the end of the passageway.

Darktouch, quick! Urgent fingers dancing bony on her.

The corridor, still no more than man high, widened. Every fifty paces or so there were globes of the muted undark, and they threw circles of undark onto the blackness. It was strange and regular, too regular to be human. So she knew this was the work of the first Windbringer.

As they crossed the pools of undark, Darktouch found her eye-touching clearer than ever. Her father stood out as a mass of many textures, coiling and uncoiling, and cut by knife-sharp shadows.

(Why are these pools built into the old passageways, destined for permanence? she thought. Then she thought: Perhaps the early people needed them. Perhaps they shared my secret sense. Perhaps it is a lost talent. . . .)

A room. No undark here.

In mid-room the floor gave way to a nothingness. Something was moored there, to a stake, with a thick rope. She felt the coils, tough, skin-chafing. Her ears touched a whisper of a wind. . . .

We are on the edge of the wind, Darktouch, Windstriker signed. *This is the private mooring room of . . . your mother and me, Darktouch. She who was given to the wind. It is my love for you, strange daughter, that brings you here, breaking all propriety.*

Our airskiff floats here, over the void, he went on. *When we unmoor it, the gates will open and we will be in utter darkness, save for the wind's big arms. Are you afraid? Shall I leave you here, have you take your chances?*

Timidly she signed, *I am afraid. But I will go.*

He touched her mechanically, masking his emotions. *When we push off,* he signed, *the wind will hit you, hard. But perhaps you'll learn to love it, I mean the big loneliness.*

He cradled her in his arms and lifted her on to the airskiff. A wind brushed her; she felt it bob up and down, buoyed by the air.

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He put his hand on hers and placed it on a flat panel. It was soft, leather-skinned. When she skimmed it she felt sharp blips. *The other ships,* he signed. *Remember their signs, their patterns. There* . . . he guided her hand . . . *those are the underfleet. They will sweep underneath us always, weaving the patterns of force. They have no stuncannon, but their positions, perfectly synchronized, generate a forceshield into which the Windbringer will fall stunned.*

We, daughter, and the other stunhunters . . . are the ones who will bring him down.

Blip. Blip. They pricked her palms, the little pulses that were airskiffs. She cast her eyes around her to see what they could touch. The glint of metal there was in the vague undark; airskiffs, the passagewalls, the angels, all were of the old things that came with the creation.

He signed that she should stash their food in a little panel under the floor, which was a metal frame covered with hide. She learned how the wings were raised and lowered.

These . . . he pushed her hand against cold metal, sharp-edged against the wings . . . *are propellers. Don't touch them once we are in flight. You'll lose your hand. Then you'll be silent forever.*

She sat, retracted into herself, and it was very cold.

And now, before we go, he signed.

As she felt with her hand, he drew out a flask from the floor panel. Of course, the scent dousing. Without the delicate, directional scents of the various skiff-types wafting in the wind, many of the hunters would lose direction.

Windstriker unstoppered the flask. Heavy fumes. Nausea. *If you must vomit, do so now!*

She retched over the side. Her throat felt raw. Nothing came.

She remembered her lessons now, and breathed in deeply, *remembering* the smell. The pungent, acrid scent penetrated her, made her guts miserable—and then she smelt another odor through it: a sweet afterfragrance. Windstriker began to sprinkle the boat with it, splashing the liquid over everything, over their hands, too; there was grease in it, and something else, lighter than that; several immiscible fluids. He pressed a stud and sent the odor wafting outwards, away from them.

For the sake of Windbringer—her father scratched the words hard against her palms, both hands in mirror fashion, almost drawing blood—*this is the smell of a stunhunter.*

I know, father. I've taken the lessons. I know I may only have my nose to guide me, if the skiff's data panel should fail.

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Now I'm setting the homing device, he signed.

(I'm still his Tickle, his little daughter, Darktouch thought impatiently.) But with a twinge of love for him. . . .

Darktouch knew, of course, from the models in the teaching room that every child fingered and handled with such longing, how an airskiff worked. She knew there was a steering mechanism, propellers operated by a strange force called electricity, for which power boxes were delivered in the places where the food materialized. That the wings could be retracted, angled, halved, extended in whatever way necessary for the fleet to maintain its position. That the skiff had a thinker inside it that was set for home, and could be set for other directions, so that it could fly without a flier, if its owner were killed. . . .

She wasn't prepared for its smallness. Its precariousness. Why, she could stretch out her arms and she was touching either side of it.

Her father showed her where the safety belts were. Then he turned round to warm the engine and to feel the gauges for fuel and power. Fuel was another thing that came by the miracle of Windbringer's bounty. Then he cut the engine on and Darktouch felt the floor tremble, a soft purring like a mother's touch. . . .

Windstriker—

Afraid?

No. It's just that . . . well, I've been selfish, haven't I? And foolish, too. I didn't think about you at all when I ran away to you. I've just realized—I've doomed us both, haven't I?

No matter. We'll find another village. But his touch felt clammy and false.

Then he touched her all over and signed, *You're not properly covered, girl!*

It was true. Her crotchshield had been lost in the panic. *Well, daughter, cover yourself!* he signed gruffly, throwing her a rag. *This is serious, sacred work we're doing, bringing the Windbringer home. If you die, do you want to meet him naked?*

I've brought about your downfall! she signed hysterically. Then, hesitantly, she signed, *Father, Father.*

No matter.

That was how much he respected the bond of birth and death, Darktouch thought wonderingly. He could sign "no matter" when at best they would be driven out, become pariahs in another village, not knowing the signs they used, learning a new language, gathering food instead of hunting . . . or at worst, the dark country. To

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meet the angels in the flesh.

She wanted to tell him how much she loved him. The feeling welled up in her but she could signal nothing. But she was about to mention some mindless triviality, to cover up her emotions, when—

The gate flipped open!

All at once the wind caught them like a toy and darkness enveloped her, and they were flung into the howling of the windshapes, into the ghosts that flapped against them with signs of anguish—

The wind pinned her down. A shape of terror escaped her throat, a hoarse breathing exploded from her mouth, her eyes touched nothing, her ears touched a thousand screamshapes echobounding crashing around her—

Windstriker caught her in his arms, pried her from the flooring, made sure her belt was secure. Now her hand protruded above the skiffwall and she felt her hair stream behind her.

From a distance, the wind carried the smell of the other stunhunters and she could pick out their positions. She could almost have scratched the formation on the floor beneath her. At this distance the smell was sweet. Only the strange, almost cloying afterfragrance came wafting towards her, not the pungent concentrate.

After a while the wind abated a little. Or she became used to it. Darkness was everywhere. They sliced through the darkness smoothly, like a knife through water. There was an exaltation now. As though the wind were burning all feeling from her, leaving only the movement itself, the arc of flight. After a time her body fell into tune with the humming vibration of the skiff's engine. She and the skiff were one giant instrument, one fingerchant, one rhythm.

Now she understood why both of her parents had to become hunters. How could anyone stay home and gather food, when they could fly in the wind like this?

(I'll never fear the dark again, she thought fiercely.)

There was no undark to awaken her eyes; only the howling windshapes rang in her ears. They ploughed through wind that seemed to know no ending.

§ § §

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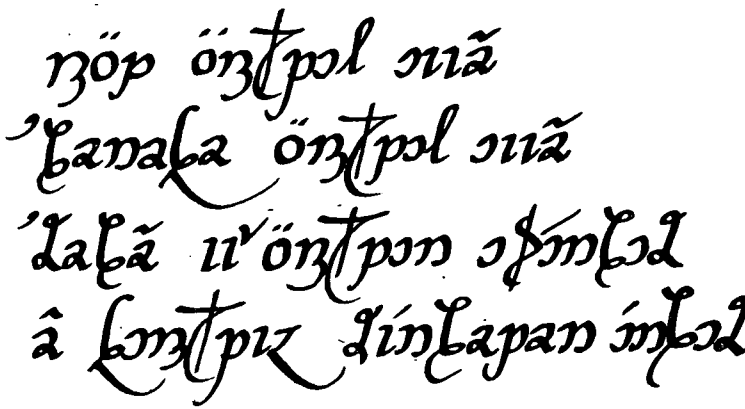
SEVEN: THE SHADOW FALLS FOREVER



mor ombrel eyáh
dhanata ombrel eyáh
chadáh y'ombren evéndek
a tembris kíndaran éndek

the shadow is mother
the shadow is death
the shadow falls forever
on the children of darkness

—Text inscribed on all gateways into the dark country

Kelver was a celebrity—for four or five days at least. Then there were more pressing problems. A pride of al'ksigarkar had been seen, skirting the Cold River. And meat was vanishing from the nutrient tanks faster than it could be recloned. They would not reach their quota for the week.

In the field that hugged the Cold River, adults were huddled around something. Grainstalks lay trampled as though a war party had swept through the fields . . . they stood under the staring sun. Kelver and some other children had come to see what was wrong, but they couldn't see through the elders that had clumped together.

Kelver pushed some boys aside—all smaller than he was—and strode toward where his uncle stood. Here the Cold River reared up on pylons for a few klomets where the land dipped a little. Rust-

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earth showed through the patches of green.

"What's happened, what's happened?" he exclaimed. They ignored him, and he heard snatches of their quick, intense whisperings. . . .

. . . *It's a violation.* . . .

. . . *They're too bold, do something.* . . .

. . . *a posse, we have to round them up and eliminate them, vermin, vermin, vermin.* . . .

Kelver couldn't make much sense of it. He stepped back to where a pylon's shadow barred the burning ground and sat down on the green. He got up at once, plucked some stalks and tried to wipe off the gooey mess. Now he knew that an al'ksigark had been here. This near to the village. He was angry. But he also wanted to take a weapon and join the hunt. So he sprang up and went to the group of elders again, trying to become a part of them.

"Uncle, I've found its spoor."

The group fell silent. Uncle Aaye pushed his way out of the huddle and Kelver showed him the stains on his tunic from where he had tried to sit down. He turned and ran to the spot. The elders followed, stumbling and puffing, and Kelver suppressed an urge to laugh at them.

There was a patch of greenish, slimy fluid there, under the shadowbar of the pylon. Uncle Aaye ignored Kelver at once and the group started to buzz again, pushing him out. Kelver spun round and—

Suddenly he saw what the elders had been standing around before. It was more interesting than a puddle of congealing bodily fluids. So he sprinted over. Some kids were already prodding the body with grainstalks, then retreating. . . .

"It's a dead one!" someone yelled: "I want the skin!"

"There's two of them!" someone else was shouting. Kelver reached the spot, pushed the other children aside easily—they were too scared to get near it anyway—and then saw them.

Green-stained fur with those tiny, spiderfast legs, muscular and mammal-like, but too many and too small, a body of globs and light-sensitive patches that served as eyes, and that gaping, orcine mouth crowned by the huge rheumy nostrils where eyes would be on a man's face . . . two al'ksigarkar. One of them had his mantle partially protruded. It was perhaps a couple of square meters, at the moment, sprouting out from an orifice in the head, bright green and veined in black . . . this one had eaten well, then.

In the badlands they lived in herds, thousands of them. They spread their mantles—often amounting collectively to many square

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kilometers—and photosynthesized, and never moved at all. But . . . if a living prey came by, they could become carnivorous. They could switch over to hunting functions. Then the dormant jaws and the layers of razor fangs and the swift spider feet and the rasping claws would come into use. And there were rogues. A lone al'ksigark breaking from the herd and becoming a full carnivore, eating, eating . . . until it died. These had come far and were reduced to eating plants. Somewhere nearby there must be a herd. The pact had been violated.

For the al'ksigarkar were, in a manner of speaking, sentient, although their predominant urges were hunger and revenge. They possessed a kind of language, of perhaps two hundred different cries, produced by making their teeth clatter and rubbing their legs together . . . there had been a pact. They were not to come near the Cold River. These two had died for it.

Everyone in the village hated them more than anything. Because the al'ksigarkar, whenever they could, ate people. Not, of course, the civilized ones of the village, unless they wandered out too far from a displacement plate . . . but there were the ghost people in the desert, a stone age culture that one never saw or thought about much, except when one came stumbling into the village, his arm bitten off at the shoulder, once in a decade or so. . . .

Only an Inquestral summons—and that once in a very long time—could take you safely to Effelkang. They could send an air-floater for you that would cover the distance in less than a day. Only Uncle Aaye had ever done that. . . .

Kelver looked at the corpses—in the heat they had already begun to decompose, and the stench was staggering—and listened to the buzz of the elders as they discussed plans for a punitive search and the buzz of small insects that hovered over the dead al'ksigarkar. "Disgusting," he said to himself.

Behind him, all the kids were screaming, "Let's have a hunt! A hunt!"

"Want to play, Kevi?" A shy girl's voice. It was two-winter-old Haller who had always had a secret crush on him.

"I'm too old—" Kelver saw the imploring look. "All right."

"You can be the al'ksigark!" a fat boy shouted. "You're the biggest and baddest!"

"Ha!" Kelver cried out scornfully, running for the nearest displacement plate.

Picking a direction at random, Kelver found himself following the

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River. A coolness came from it. Once or twice he stopped to lick the dew that always settled on its walls, collected into pockets crevassed by the way the moss grew . . . he found himself staring at the Skywall. He found he could see no sky at all, almost as though it were winter and the suns had gone to sleep.

At the base of the River walls, a faint blue light showed him the way. He hadn't come to this part of the Skywall before: it rose straight up here. Usually if they played they ran to a part within sight of the village, where some of the pylons to the Cold River had steplike holds and you could balance atop the river's walls. One day on a dare he had even perched on an impossible ledge and launched three stones at his uncle's house with a slingshot.

(He also remembered the beating. They'd had to reglaze the roof. . . .)

He stared at the wall and. . . .

I don't want to fight for the Inquest anymore, when I grow older, he decided, remembering the to-do after the tachyon bubbles, and finally forcing himself to remember his father's corpse.

A grief touched him. He didn't understand it; he didn't want it; but he couldn't dismiss it with just a shrug.

"There he is, ambling along like he doesn't know what's coming to him!" A shrill voice piercing his thoughts.

Ah well, they've found me. I was beginning to feel lonely.

Other children charging at him—

He did a passable al'ksigark screech and a girl looked pale and stopped in mid-run for a moment—

He turned and sprinted towards the mountain.

An idea. He reached one of the pylons that supported the Cold River, about eighty meters above his head now, and climbed it quickly. Then he grasped a vine that hung from the river wall and shinnied up with a bloodcurdling yell. The cold burned his stomach so he unflattened himself and held on with his elbows and knees. They were little points of cold knifing into him—

"He's going to climb up there, the devilish al'ksigark!"

He stood on the wall, and underneath him the crowd of children were hooting and booing. "I'm sick of this game!" he shouted down.

"Al'ksigark! Al'ksigark!"

"Go catch a real one!"

Nimbly he ran along the wall—it was perhaps a half meter wide—without so much as looking at the Cold River rushing below, soundless under its protective forcefield and shooting out tendrils of cloud as it hurtled towards somewhere far away.

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The River ran into solid rock. *Now what?*

"Quick!" A little voice. "This way!"

"Huh . . .? Haller!" he gasped. "You're supposed to be chasing me. . . ."

"I know a place they'll never find you—" He saw her now, lit by the riverglow from below; upside-down the shadows of her face. "Here." She flattened herself on the ridge and inched onto a ledge of the black rock, and Kelver saw a fissure. With a faint light coming from deep within. They crouched at the jagged opening.

A room.

"Do you hear the other kids yelling?" she said. "They'll never find us, not until we're ready—"

A shy smile.

The room . . . a cavern rather, with rock walls that shimmered with a cold phosphorescence. Kelver took a few steps. There didn't seem to be an end to the room. . . .

"I didn't know there were any passages inside the Skywall," he said softly, wondering.

Above, the ceiling glittered like a starlit winter night when the suns slept, silverglitter of far stars, of far worlds . . . a longing tugged at him.

Above, a vague screaming—

"Shit." Kelver stopped dead. "They've found us." He darted further into the cavern. A passageway suddenly opened where he thought was a mere crack in the rock. . . .

Another cave now.

And silence.

For a moment he almost wanted Haller with him. But she was doubtless still out there, timidly waiting his return.

"Powers of powers," he whispered. "It's *artificial.*"

Walls here, metallic silvergleaming walls that curved up in a majestic sweep to twine in a spiralling roof shrinking to infinity, whether mirrors or reality he couldn't think. . . .

A hum, fainter than a heartbeat. Machinery.

Crystals set into the walls. Studs, patterned lights, twinkling.

There were curves here. An orgy of curves, sinuous, sensuous, to his eyes that were from a world bound by straight edges . . . mirror curves. Soft twisting metal, like waves of a girl's hair in the wind, but frozen. . . .

"Why is it always *I* who make the discoveries in this village?" he said. The echo came back from behind him, louder than his own voice, and softedged like a shape in dawnmist. . . .

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Slowly he crossed the room.

The spiral ceiling turned with him, a giant corkscrew of a mirror. Footsteps, loud, harsh. His own. He stopped, whirled round, before he realized he was alone here. Sighed relief. Strode across the room now, pretending confidence.

Then he found the round door. It was twice manhigh, set into the wall, an ordinary enough doorway; and at its side an ordinary door-stud.

He deliberated for a while, then thought: *Let the children worry!*

He shrugged and pressed the stud.

The door dissolved and—

Thunder crashed in the distance! A crazy labyrinth of passage-ways twisting, forking, weaving, warping—

The wind hit him.

He stood his ground for a few moments, stunned. The wind rushed at him, gusted over him, his hair flew and his tunic flapped, there was no wind like this in the world, vehement, pungent, alive—

On the wind he smelled . . . a fragrance he couldn't recognize. A scent that stirred excitement and rage and desire, all at once, as the warm wind battered him and shook him into shivering—

After a few moments the wind subsided a little. And then the song came. Just an echo of an echo of an echo of a songsnatch, caressing his ears so that he almost yelped with the joy of it, and then it was gone and a grief came on him, a tragedy he couldn't understand. . . .

Got to close the door! I can't stand it—

Palm slammed on stud. Cold metal biting him.

The door resolved again.

Silence.

And then he saw the words that were written on the door, written in the Inquestral highscript that he had learned—with many beatings—from his uncle, in an ancient hand, etched onto the metal with a quill dipped in acid, no doubt:

THE SHADOW IS MOTHER
THE SHADOW IS DEATH
THE SHADOW FALLS FOREVER
ON THE CHILDREN OF DARKNESS

and then he knew that this was the gateway to the dark country.

As he turned his back on the door, dread breathed on his neck, like an al'ksigark ready to pounce.

Somehow he felt he must be in trouble. *I'll never tell uncle! Never!*

He heard his own breathing re-echo from behind like the breath-

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ing of a giant creature. . . .

Run! Run!

The fragrance lingered beneath the surface of his mind. There was a new longing there, quickly repressed. It was more urgent than the scent of a girl, even. . . .

Quick! Back into the passageway, out into the cavern, don't look at anything.

Footsteps, patter, patter, patter

You don't see the machines.

patter patter

You don't see the walls the curve and curl and swirl like dreams of girls. You don't smell the fragrance.

patter

He scooted into the passageway. Rock rubbed against his shin. He cried out, giving himself away.

You don't hear the song.

He emerged. They ambushed him.

"Ha, ha, al'ksigark, the village sleeps safe tonight—"

"Hey, let me breathe!"

With a sigh he gave himself up to their gleeful vengeance. But his mind was somewhere else.

EIGHT: LIGHT ON THE SOUND

Loneliness. The wild windstream, like a firetouch. The airskiff ploughing, rocking a little . . . and the darkness stretching for ever. Darktouch with her hands on the pulsescreen, measuring the patterns of airskiffs, cross-hatching, shifting, coalescing somewhere beneath them. When she raised her head her eyes touched nothing. But here and there she would smell a soft odor of bittersweet or peardrop, as skiffs of the appropriate scent-class settled into position.

Windstriker moved around, setting controls and sniffing the air for his directions, relying more on scent than on the datascreens. Sometimes he would hand her a ruddertip to hold fast against the wind. Sometimes she would be ordered to heave her weight against one of the levers that lifted the wingflaps. The skiff would shudder for a moment, ease into a new direction on the windcurrent, and then the shuddering would smooth out and they would sail as in a dream.

She slept awhile. She dreamt of pincers gouging her eyes out, and

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the blood-trickle congealing on her face. She woke with a start. A whole sleep had passed. They soared now, they and the other stun-hunters; she could smell them through the smothering blanket of darkness.

More time passed. But there was no touching to mark time.

Her father's hand, suddenly, tense: *Sniff!*

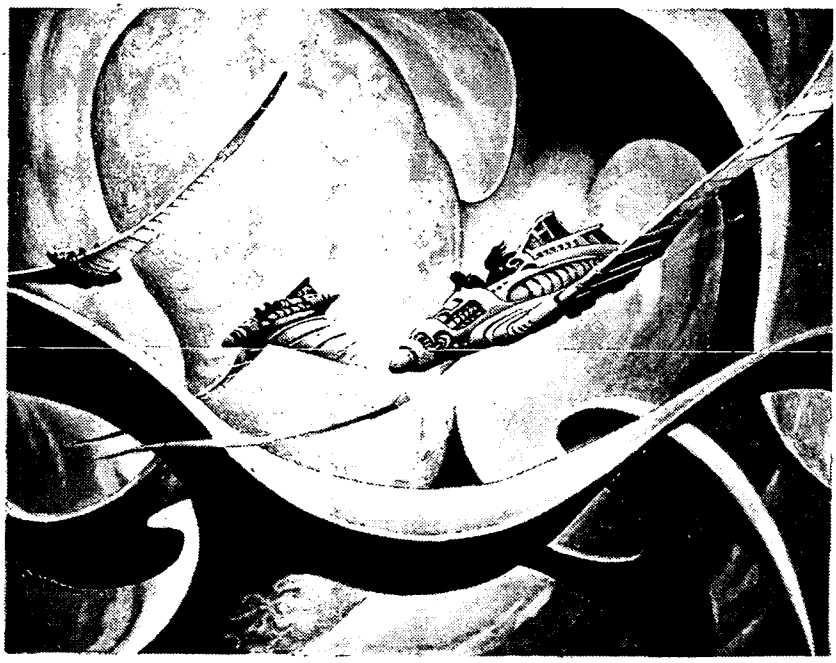
—the scent of the preparation room, the steam drenched with the gall of the Windbringer, the sweet fragrance in the hot mist—

Windbringer, she signed. *He's near.*

Yes, her father's hand signed, a quick tick of contact. Still her eyes touched nothing. Only her nose sensed it, the shadow of an awesome thing. . . .

The wind was wrong. There was a pocket in the wind ahead, a hollow of calm. The wind dividing, shearing off in two directions, skirting a vast emptiness. *Windbringer.*

Quick, father signed. An object in her hand, round, knobbly. A grenade. The stunners would be separating now, soaring above Windbringer, seeking to drug him with high-velocity opiate pellets from their stunguns and with burrowing grenades. She knew what



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to do. When it struck the living skin, it would start to burrow, claws would gouge out scraps of flesh, needles would inject paralysis gases stored inside at tremendous pressure. It was beautiful, how Windbringer fashioned his own homecoming.

The object gave off a glint of undark. She knew it for one of the old things. She knew it must cause pain, like the rituals of adulthood; but this was part of the order of the cosmos. Gingerly she put it down, fearful. She did not want it to be triggered off by her body warmth.

Windstriker placed her hands on the mechanism for firing the stuncannons too. He let her waste a volley into darkness, to make sure she had gotten it right.

Then they soared!

Darktouch touched the pounding of her heart. Wind churned against their passage. The airskiff soared up glided propellers roared wings lifted rudders turned hair flapped forward backward sideways wrapped itself around her face—

The tang came from beneath now. She hurled the burrower and her ears touched a dead, abrupt windshape and she knew she'd hit. Wind thrashed crazily around, echoed the Windbringer's thrashing, still darkness and wind and the sweet intoxicating smell—

Good, Windstriker signed, his finger touching the databoard. He fired the cannon and

—fingers of undark lightning flashing, a moment of undark, a shadow, a huge sailsac, throbbing vast darkness—

Windstriker! her fingers danced. *He's moving, I feel it with my eyes, I feel it on the wind!*

Above them another vessel spewed sparks of undark and her eyes touched hugeness, glitterstippled, wet flesh at the limits of eye-touching—

She was hurling grenades now more in terror than anything. Her eyes had touched the living Windbringer and all she could do was throw frantically, windshapes of terror bursting from her lips—

We're too close! Windstriker signed, his fingers grating on her back. *More power, got to move up more, into the wind-drift—*

(Don't be too brave Father don't dare too much now Father, she signed in her mind, crying out. . . .)

The skiff bucked, a flash of undark from another skiff above—

—sailsac lashing towards them for a split second—

Then the windwave exploded, grenades flew, struck her face, she flung herself on the skiff floor and—

She reached out to her father. He stood breasting the strong wind,

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emotionless.

And then she knew that her father's great moment had come. He had vowed to be taken by Windbringer in the most blessed of deaths. He had shown daring beyond all daring since her mother's death, in his search for a glorious end. . . .

Her father signed against her neck, *Goodbye . . . daughter.*

No! No! Another flash of undark and—

The great sailsac whipped forward. Darktouch clutched the boat hard and her eyes touched her father still standing arms outstretched as though to embrace the wind—

Then Father falling towards the quivering flesh so graceful in the wind—

Sailsac flailing the boat, the skiff skimming the skin, slipping, catching the wind, soaring, out of reach, and

Dead pocket of Windbringer plummeting.

The airskiff spinning crazily, slowing down, easing.

Like a slèepwalker she righted the controls and set the homing pattern. Touching the message panel, her hands read the signs that told of victory. Darkness had come again, and her eyes did not touch the last of her father, nor did her ears touch the windshape of crashing, hitting.

(I may as well jump in after him, she thought. His life is fulfilled now. They'll make a beautiful fingerchant about Windstriker, bravest of the brave, and children will chant it till their fingers are sore. But no one will remember *me,* the freak, the failure—)

The convoy was drifting homewards. Below her, she knew, Windbringer lay immobile, trapped in the meshing forcefields, the life bleeding away from him.

And then—

Then came the Windbringer's last song. . . .

Gallendys Thinkhive Memory: SECRET: RETRIEVAL ONLY ON GRAND INQUESTRAL OVERRIDE: Report on the Gallendys Exploration Mission. COUNCILLOR TON GADREZ ASH UKANDERRAKH: What do you mean, Kaz Errekath, you cannot describe the imagesongs you allegedly saw on this planet of yours?

KAZ ERREKATH (Expedition Leader): . . . Lord Inquestor, they were songs of utter beauty, utter joy. We can never disturb the delphinoids, sir. Otherwise—

COUNCILLOR GADREZ: You presume to command the Inquest?

KAZ ERREKATH: Slow bands of light, sir. Each band a stardust-speckled rainbow. Troughs of lights in pastels, crossing the far walls

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of basalt, the crystal dust in the rock catching the glitterfire and sparkling fiercely, dying . . . lightforms undulating . . . and the music! Slow, stately music. They should have music like this to accompany the movements of the stars . . . oh, powers of powers I can't go on, I've been touched, I've been changed . . . mother! father!
COUNCILLOR GADREZ: Remand him and the others in the custody of Huriel of the clan of Healers. Erase their memories. Even the memory of the Inquestor who travelled with them.
Thinkhive's addendum: The new identities were found unsuccessful upon re-examination twelve standard years later. None ever recovered their senses, so the Inquest compassionately devived them.

First came the undark. Warm to the touch, warming her eyes. New textures of warmths, new scents of undark played with her eyes. And a quiet throb of windshape, a slow pulse like a heartbeat but lower, deeper, that plucked her body like a string, so that she vibrated with it. . . .

In the undark, slowly, the Windbringer flailed against the wind, she felt the wind curve and part on either side of the skiff.

The undark rose slowly. More undark than ever her eyes had touched. It was like—

Embrace of an ancient mother wind coming to life with motes of undark, soft quiet glitter like the whispertouches of a mother on a newborn baby, wombwarmth of an eyetouching . . . and a fingerchanting of windshapes, the air dancing on her ears like risen angels. . . .

Then strands of undark, another shade, weaving like the fingers of touch-siblings who have begun to explore each other's bodies for the first time, meshing, breaking away, points of undark that broke free from the strands in time with the fingerchanting of the dancing wind. . . .

(Father's dead, she thought wonderingly.) But she was distanced from that thought; she felt no grief yet. Only the immense warmth of undark on her eyes.

Then explosion of undark! Stinging her eyes, burning them! Sudden searing warmth, the blur of tears concealing everything, pellets of windshape caressing her ears! A thousand fires bursting, her eyes stretching to unthinkable limits and touching far walls that trembled with the touching! Grenades of undark imploding in her guts!

And then a quiet glow of undark that quelled the howling with its soft-whistling windshapes, that calmed the nightmare like the slow fingerchant of a mother shushing her child. . . .

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Through the blur her eyes found faint webs of undark.

It was the edge of a terrible beauty. And anguish, too. As if the pain of the Windbringer in his death throes were being transformed by sheer will into patterns of warmth, of comfort. She stood for a very long time. The firetouch washed over her like clear fragrant water. The imagesong played on her eyes and ears, and finally became—

A raging tornado with herself as its eye, patterns upon patterns, levels upon levels of undark and windshapes—

None of the others perceive this! she signed to herself. *Now I understand what my special gift is for!*

The undark sang to her of beauty mercilessly slaughtered, of a dream shattered before the end of the dreaming—

And we are the murderers! Because all the others—are dark to the Windbringer's song! We're all butchers! There's a terrible, terrible injustice in our universe and only I can touch it!

The imagesong was faint now. Through the parting dark she touched reflections within reflections, echoes within echoes. Then the windshapes rebounded from the far walls and piled harmony upon harmony and shade upon shade of the undarkness, until the whole universe seemed to be one song, one living thing, and she an alien openmouthed in wonder, being drawn into it, her body humming with the hymn of all creation. . . .

The song subsided.

If Windstriker had known this—

She found anger in herself at last.

—he'd never have been a hunter! He'd never have been a murderer of beauty!

The airskiff splintered the shards of undark, scattering them into chaos as it flew homeward.

And the song was over.

And then she knew that she would run and run until she found an answer. She would force open the chambers of the dead if need be. She would thrust into the caverns where the cold angels waited for the dead. *Someone must know the truth!* Someone must be able to convince her that she wasn't crazy, that this special gift wasn't a terrible delusion. . . .

(I'm not human and I know it, she thought. My eyes are my special thing.) She couldn't go back and lose them. Now that she had touched the undark behind the darkness. Perhaps the dark country of the dead was the only place for her now. She didn't belong anywhere.

Her fingers drummed the old chant:

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Jumper jumping
in the wind

Only the memory of the undark was alive, burned into her soul, as the airskiff sped on its preprogrammed journey back to the walls of the world, in a darkness heavy with loss. . . .

She didn't notice the churning wind as it gathered up the skiff and plunged it homeward. Nor the messages pinging on the databoard, pricking her fingers and telling of joy and victory. She stood in the wind like one already dead. Part of her had gone with the Windbringer. For ever.

Running. Running.

The door to the land of the dead.

Then a familiar touch. *Get away!* she lashed out. *Don't touch me!* Her Touch-brother was pressed against the door, his arm covering the stud.

She touched him, but the song of the undark was singing inside her, its touch was more vivid than the touch of Boy-before-Naming—in the diffuse undark she noticed the blood on her Touch-brother's eyes. *You did this to yourself!* she signed softly. He didn't react, but seemed to withdraw further, but never moving from the doorway.

Go away, Girl-before-Naming! I've been shamed!

My name is Darktouch!

A fine name, that . . . I should let you walk in there, into the dark country—to die!

She hugged him, then. Deep inside him there was a little warmth. How wan compared to the singing warmth of the whole cosmos. . . . *What use was mutilating yourself?* she signed sadly. *Now you'll run away, I suppose, and live in another village as an outsider. They'll never make you one of them, and you'll never find another Touch-sibling. . . . For the sake of Windbringer! We are bound by scent and touch, Boy-before-Naming.*

He pulled away, backing further into the door. She grasped his arm firmly. *Don't run from me! I've been on the hunt of the Windbringers, and I've touched a new, terrible truth! The legends lie, Boy-before-Naming!*

You're only lying so you can get away with never growing up, her Touch-brother signed. *You've hurt me, you've played with my life as though we weren't bound at all. Don't presume on our bond!*

No, no, she signed hysterically. *There is a great mystery, a beautiful undark that comes from Windbringers. And we're all guilty of*

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murdering it! I've got a power, an overtouch, and I know my eyes have touched the truth!

He was still now, his body straining to catch her words. Softly a wind touched them, driving his familiar scent into her nostrils and making her ache with her love for him. But even this love was a darkness compared to the haunting thing that lived in her heart. She touched him all over. He was less real than the big undark. Even though she could feel how his arms were scoured rough with the wind-dust of the lonely wind.

I'm going away, Touch-brother. I don't know where. But first I must go through the caverns where the dark country begins and where the angels live. There must be another world somewhere—even if it's beyond the deathland! Where they know the answers. Why do I possess this overtouching? Why has our past lied to us? I've got to find out why they've caused us to murder the songs for so long! Then I can come back and stop everything!

Tenderly she touched his face. The eyes were congealing, sticky. She smelled hot blood. He must hurt terribly.

What's the use? Touch-brother signed wearily. *We're bound by scent and loyalty. You're a power woman, even though it may be power for evil. I've got to come with you. All we have is each other. Until we die.*

He stepped aside.

Elation surged in Darktouch. The memory of the imagesong sang in her. She pressed the stud, seized her Touch-brother's hand, and raced for the opening that appeared in the wall—

They were at the beginning of the dark country.

They took a wary step.

An angel swooped with a screeching windshape, gleaming harshly—

NINE: BELOW THE WATER, ABOVE THE WIND

The Square—open to the populace only on days of feasting or coronations or the weddings of princelings—was desolate in the sunlight. Davaryush walked to the firefountain, about three hundred meters from where the airtube reached the ground.

Mosaic stones clashed and flashed, catching the slow dance of suns' light. He waited until the suns had crossed behind the tallest of the far spires and were hidden in the umbrella of Kallendrang, mushrooming out from the spire's apex. . . .

Then there was another shadow. But he heard no one breathing,

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even though the shadow of a man had crossed his face. He turned slowly. His eyes met the amber eyes of a young man, eyes that focused on nothing. He wore a plain gray tunic and moved stiffly. He pushed a message disk into Davaryush's hands. Davaryush snatched his hand back. The stranger's hand had been like ice.

Follow this messenger, the letters danced across the plastic. *He won't talk. He's dead. He will lead you.* Qithe qithembara. *Follow him. He cannot talk.*

So that's why he isn't breathing. Davaryush had never come so close to a servocorpse before; they were used on some planets, and were as commonplace to some as robots or slaves might be . . . but they had none on his homeworld, nor on the seminary planet where he had learned to be an Inquestor.

The dead man waited, unnaturally still.

"I'm ready," Davaryush said.

The corpse beckoned him to follow. It moved silently over the mosaic stones, never pausing. After a while Davaryush followed, his nervous footsteps echoing imperfectly the even shuffle of dead feet.

They passed the firefountain. They were in an area of mosaic that depicted—Davaryush knew this from seeing it from above, for he would not have recognized the picture so close up—the first landing of Kaz Errekath on Gallendys. They crossed a wide swath of faceted blue stones, the Sea of Tulangdaror no doubt; about ten meters later, harsh browns represented the desert of Zhnefftikak. And then a striation of blackness.

The dead man stamped three times on the black stones. Suddenly Davaryush realized that they were sinking into the ground, he and the servocorpse; that a portion of the tile floor was easing into the ground. He panicked for a moment. The corpse touched him, steadying him. The chill of the corpse's hand bit into his shoulder and crawled down his spine. Darkness closed over him and still they fell. Then he sniffed fumes.

They're killing me! he thought wildly.

An image of dawn on homeworld wavered, magenta light and a wind in the tall black grass—

The corpse held him in an unbreakable grip. The deathchill spread through him, burning.

Curse my curiosity! Curse it!

Sleep took him in the darkness.

He woke standing in a ripple-swept pool of light. They must be

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under water, in the network of forcebubbles that formed the float-foundations of the City of Effelkang.

Lines of half-dark moved across the dead man's face. The dead man released Davaryush.

Davaryush saw another person. An Inquestral shimmercloak. It blushed even in the darkness . . . already he could almost recognize the person—

Yes. Waterlight on the graystreaked highlights of the black hair. "Varuneh!"

"I am," Lady Varuneh said, "Ton Varushkadan el'Kalar Dath, Grand Inquestor, Princeling, Hunter of Utopias."

She came towards him, unsmiling. "Our other friends," she said, gesturing. He heard cloaks stirring and knew that he must be in a huge bubblechamber under the Sea of Tulangdaror. "There was a city here before Effelkang," said Varuneh. "Here, in the sea. Isn't it beautiful?" She took his hand then. Cold. And under the cold—

Desire stirred in him, incongruously. What game was she playing now? Did she suspect, did she *know,* about his fascination with her?

"Lady Varuneh—Grand Inquestor Varushkadan—we learned at the Seminary on Uran s'Varek, that you were dead."

"Daavye, Daavye," she mocked him gently, "you still believe everything they tell you, you still toe the line, then? Haven't you learnt anything?"

Davaryush knew about Ton Varushkadan—Grand Inquestor a century before his boyhood—he'd heard the tales. How she'd crushed a far rebellion by stealing a Princeling's heart; how she'd hollowed out a planet for a pleasure dome, and exploded a star for the pretty lights. . . .

"So why are you here, posing as a traitor, risking our lives?" he asked her.

Her hand clutched his harder. There was tremendous power here. He'd bluffed this game of *makrugh* too far. He was outclassed.

"Many years ago," Varuneh said, "I disappeared. I was in disgrace and should have been deprived of my rank . . . but it's a large galaxy. This is my secret realm now. Galaxies no more. I was a perfect Inquestor once. I killed completely when I killed, and with utter compassion for my victims. I destroyed a hundred utopias for the sake of the human condition. . . ."

"Then you *are* a spy of the Inquest!" said Davaryush. "And you found a flaw in my ideology, and now you must destroy me!"

The dead man stirred. Varuneh beckoned him away. "How I hate these servocorpses!" she muttered. "But what is one to do? They are

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the only servants one can trust completely. The only servants with no souls."

"You're toying with me!" Davaryush grated.

"I am not of the Inquest," said Varuneh simply. "I was destroyed . . . by Shtoma!"

At last Davaryush understood. He embraced the strange old woman, who crumpled into his arms like an armful of old rags, and wept.

Through the forceshield that prevented them from drowning, water churned, lanced by the stinging light of the high far suns. . . .

He heard Varuneh's voice, soft, bitter: "The Inquest has stifled the human race, Davaryush! It has squeezed the laughter from children by sending them to wars and death. It has frozen the old into loveless icicles . . . you and I were sent to Shtoma to crush it because it might have been a utopia. You remember, don't you, how Shtoma changed us? We went there, mocking their lack of greed and every other human quality, suspicious of everything they said and did . . . laughing at them because they rode the klomet-high varigrav coasters instead of using their knowledge of gravity control for something useful. And then we learned that their sun *Udara* had come to life, that every few years they danced in the sun's gravity fields and were purged by their sun's limitless love. And then we didn't believe in the Inquest any more, not entirely. We didn't trust its high tenets, Daavye. We thought, *Perhaps man isn't a fallen being. Perhaps he has a right to be happy.*"

Her face was aglow now, even in the half-dark. Davaryush loved her then, for they had been through it together—fallen into the sun of Shtoma, been touched by its voice, become nothings touched by love.

He remembered the endless light. . . .

No heat, no crush of gravity, because the sentient sun held them in its embrace and had mastered the environment by an act of will.

Varuneh smiled for the first time since they had met that day. "You did a foolish thing, Daavye, returning to Uran s'Varek and trying to bluff it out. You should never have faced the Inquest again. *I* knew that. I disappeared, found a new identity. The Galaxy is large, Daavye, and the Inquest only imagines it controls everything. . . ."

Davaryush waited.

"Now there's only one thing I want," she said. "I want the end of the Inquest."

Powers of powers! Davaryush thought. *At last, I've finally heard*

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the unutterable thing . . . uttered. I've had so many doubts, but I've never conceived of the destruction of the web that binds the Dispersal. . . . "No!" he cried out.

"Look around you," said Varuneh. "I am not alone."

She clapped her hands for light, and Davaryush saw that the room was crowded. Some of the people wore the shimmercloaks of the Inquest even—but the cloaks were mostly threadbare, dying ones. Among them was Ton Exkandar, the loyalest Inquestor he could have imagined. And ordinary folk too: slavechildren with chrysanthemum brands on their foreheads, young soldiers of the Overcosm Wars in their clan uniforms, princelings in their peacock-rainbow robes. All hushed and waiting. Here and there, dead men stood stiffly, ready to be commanded.

Davaryush thought: *If they really are committed to the end of the Inquest . . . they're doomed. How appropriate that they must use the dead as their slaves.* Aloud, he said: "This assembly is unsuitable! There are people who must not stand in the presence of high clans, yet they're all mingled, without order—"

"Oh, Daavye," said Varuneh, "the Inquest created the order for its own ends. This isn't the Inquest!"

Davaryush saw then the joy in all their faces. It was as though they were at the beginning of a great new journey. Here under the Sea he had found people with a strange new hope. "I should have you all executed," he said, his tone playing him false. "You have no way of defeating the Inquest—and for my own sake I should not let any of you survive!"

"We have a plan," said Varuneh, "to cripple the Inquest. We need your help. To curtail the production of starships. We must control starship production if we are to bring down thousands of years of control . . . blow up the Skywall Mountain. Cut down the Inquest at its most fragile point. And then the way will be open . . . for a real utopia."

"You're mad!" Davaryush cried. "You can't expect me to co-operate. Only I can requisition power enough to blow away this much of a planet—and only by subverting the thinkhives and lying to the Inquest. We don't indulge in wanton destruction, you know that, Varuneh—"

"Oh, really?" The voice was hard.

"You want to destroy this mountain, when there is a race of people who live in the darkness of Skywall, who harvest the brains of the delphinoids for the starships, who would perish? You want an act of violence to be the fanfare for your utopia?"

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"Remember Shtoma, Davaryush. Shtoma in the cadent lightfall."

The trap was closing in on him, the trap that had been set at the very beginning, when he had first set foot in the twin cities—

"We're all puppets, Daavye," said Varuneh. "Like . . . this servocorpse." She mindflicked at the dead man. The corpse began to dance, a slow elegant sinuous dance . . . the dead eyes hypnotized Davaryush. "That's all the Dispersal of Man is, Daavye! A cosmic corpse that twitches to the mindflicks of an Inquest crazed with power!"

"No!" cried Davaryush, grasping at all he had been taught—

"The Inquest miscalculated. As they will again. They wanted to make you perfectly loyal by making you indispensable to the human race's stability. But didn't they teach you once that change is good, that utopias imply stagnation? Doesn't that lesson tell you that the Inquest must fall . . . that this is implicit in its very ideology? Ha! I've played the game of *makrugh* longer than any living Inquestor. I can call their bluff. I've been to Shtoma, and they haven't. I'm changed, and they aren't."

"But not changed enough," Davaryush said, surprised by his own bitterness. "You're an Inquestor through and through. Especially if you would destroy a people for the sake of saving another."

He saw her pale at this. This, then, was the chink in her armor, the flaw in her great stratagem. If this were *makrugh* he should be elated at his victory. But he was not. He was only tired. Behind their struggle, he sensed a kinship. That they had shared the experience of Shtoma, yes; that they had doubted the Inquest together, and were now considering its downfall, yes. But there was a deeper kinship, too, an attraction. . . .

Then Varuneh said, very tired, "We're not playing anymore, are we? Well, let me tell you another thing, something you must have seen through already. I love you."

Then she tottered into the crowd, never once looking back at the man with the power of life and death over her, over the whole planet.

And Davaryush knew that she had played *makrugh* with consummate mastery. By playing the final card, the one that said, *I am not playing* makrugh *with you.* She was all Inquestor, that woman. He knew that she knew his every weakness. He'd been indecisive, he'd procrastinated, not wanting to face the canker in himself. The last remark had gone in like a twisted laserknife, a masterstroke of *makrugh.* No matter what side she was on, she was of the clan of Ton. A master Inquestor.

I'll co-operate, he thought.

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He forced himself to forget about the people behind the Skywall, the people of eternal darkness.

The harshness of the undersea lighting brought tears to his eyes. Across the floor, the dead man was still dancing; for the Lady Varuneh had not yet rescinded her command.

It was morning in Kallendrang. False mauve-tinged light from a long-dead planet tinted the glittering spires. Davaryush stood before the thinkhive. . . .

Something has happened, said the thinkhive. *There are two persons in the corridors that lead out of the Dark Country, where my angels rend the dead for return to the water of the Sunless Sound. But they're not dead. I think they're trying to escape.*

"Aren't you going to do something?" Davaryush said curtly.

They won't get far. They're deaf and blind. Even if they crawl out of the mountain, my searcher drones will eventually be activated. The angels will follow them wherever they go. The machinery's a little creaky—it's never been activated, after all—but it's there.

What could a man do, a man who had to protect the unity of the Galaxy, a *heretic?* The Inquest was bursting at the seams. "But why," Davaryush shouted into the empty room, "why the secrecy? Why must they all be deaf and blind?"

Sorry, but you are not of sufficient rank to be informed. This is all I can divulge: that the motive is compassion.

Davaryush stormed from the room.

He found the elevator tube to the summit of Kallendrang, many klomets above the Sea. In the airtube the wind rushed against him, a clean, powerful feeling. He reached the dais at the high summit, the point from which the city's protective domeshield was generated. Here, shards of the true dazzling sky of Gallendys splintered the purple dawn. There was a turret that led outside, a hundred steps of curving metal. . . .

Now he was outside the field. Below, the cities sparkled. Two suns glared, but it was cold because of the elevation, and a thin wind whistled about the deck. And then he saw the sea beneath, fiercely reflecting back the suns' light. It stretched to the far horizons and blended with the shimmering, haze-hung sky—

From one edge of the horizon, the black edge of Skywall, peering from the water and distorting the perspectives.

From behind the Skywall mountain would come an answer!

And someone was trying to escape from there, even now. Why? It was hopeless. But he must talk to those people. Find out what

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the thinkhive would not reveal. He shivered in the high wind.

And then another thought—

The dead man twitching in parody of a dancer, in the room under the city.

It's true! he thought bitterly. *We are all dead people! But somehow I think I am being readied for something. I'm never going to be a dancing servocorpse. I've been changed—by knowledge. The whole universe is changing, and the Inquest is playing* makrugh *with forces even* it *cannot handle. The old things must crumble . . . like timed ink on an old message disk.*

And now someone's trying to get out of the mountain. It's a sign! I wish them well. Their people are doomed. But we must all burst free now—from the cage of the Inquest, from the prisons we have built around our own hearts.

"I'm free!" he shouted into the howling wind. "I'm free! I'm free!"

He felt no joy in it at all. Only pain. His old teacher Ton Alkamathdes had been right: *The breaking of joy is the beginning of wisdom,* he had said. It was the central tenet of the utopia hunter. . . .

He saw the dream of utopia that Varuneh and the others had. It was a beautiful thing. But the beauty was an ache, an emptiness, a terrible hunger. And Varuneh's way of achieving it—through violence—was not perfect. But he could see no other way!

But the dream . . . the dream. . . .

He remembered Varuneh then, sleeping softly in the dawnlight of a dead world. They'd found each other, but time was already running out. No wonder they slept together in the light of an annihilated planet. They were committed; they had already chosen death. It was strange, how much more alive one became, when one had something to believe in.

The time had come to throw away the past. To be a heretic in deed as well as in thought. He'd found himself—with a vengeance. Under his terrible exhaustion, Davaryush found a wary elation, almost . . . a peace. For he had come to Shtoma in the cadent lightfall, and he had danced on the face of the sun.

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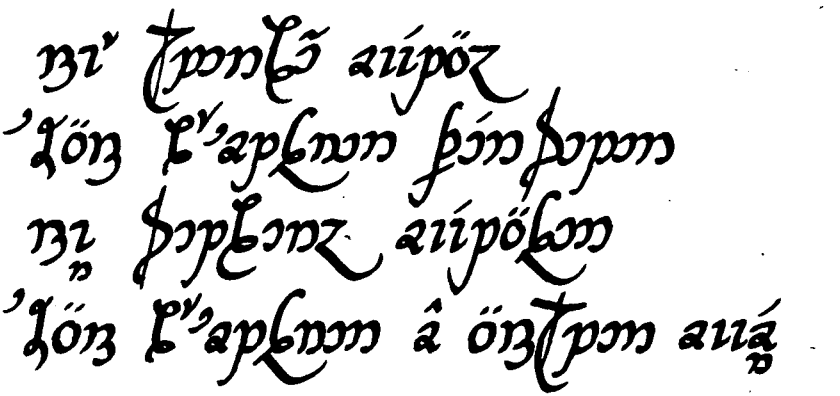
TEN: FROM DARKNESS TO DARKNESS



mi' brendéh aíros
chom z'hartnen Zhénveren
min vérdens aíroten
chom z'hartnen a ombren ayán

Love burns me like the wasteland of Zhnefftikak
Love freezes me like the wasteland under the shadow

—*Gallendaran love song*

Quick! Dodge it now! Darktouch signed, throwing herself and her Touch-brother to one side—

—cold metal of the angel scraping skin, sharp pain, warm blood trickling—

(Got to keep moving! she told herself.) Touch-brother signed *Faster, faster,* but her body was solid rock, rooted like the rock of the world itself. Further down the pathway they stumbled. She turned and touched the metal angel with her eyes. In the diffuse undark it glowed, splinters of flashing warmth rippling down its body. It was burrowing into the floor where it had landed, where they'd been standing.

Harsh thudding windshapes as it scratched at the bare stone. Rock shards spattering the smooth surface of the angel. Whoosh of the closing door, change in the wind's direction.

It's eating us up, it thinks! she signed. *It doesn't know we're alive,*

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we can move . . . if we stay moving, if we're cautious, we can make it!

The stud to re-open the door was blocked by the spidery angel. They were trapped. They could only go onward. *Quick!*

Above, here and there, her eyes touched glinting metal creatures. Ominously they moved, scanning from the ceiling with swift criss-crossing lances of undark. The shafts moved in a slow fingerchant. Against her body she felt Touch-brother's pounding heart. He didn't know the place and he had no eyes to guide him.

Slowly, easing down from the vague height—

The angels were descending!

Run! her fingers rasped. *The angels are coming down, I touch them with my eyes!*

They moved with a clanging, jarring windshape, spider arms stretched out and catching the filaments of undark that rippled in the heavy air—

She ran, her hands just touching her Touch-brother, her only contact with the old world. Her hand on him: *Hold me! Don't let go or you'll be lost!*

I can't run! I don't know this place, there's nothing to memorize, there's too much for my feet to understand all at once—

Trust me, it's not dark to me—

I can't, I—

Pebbles biting her feet. Now and then a vertebra crunching. Now the squish of a fresh dead man. She stumbled over a skull, lost contact with Touch-brother, turned, touched a whiff of fear, eyes touched him flailing the emptiness, scratching despairing word-shapes on the heedless air. Her hand seized his arm. *Don't let go!* They'd been still for several moments and now an angel had scanned them and was plummeting, so gracefully, so deadly—

They're not made to catch the living! she signed as they dodged it. *If you stop they'll think you're a corpse, then they'll devour you—*

The angel crashed on to rock, began to pound the hard basalt, sending sharp windshapes into Darktouch's ears. She whirled and eyes touched Touch-brother being mauled by a glistening claw, she pulled, wrenched him loose, he was like a sack of old Windbringer entrails, there was no life in him at all, must keep running she thought, never mind the blood—

Touch-brother weakening in her grip.

Cold metal jabbed at her back. In the distance her eyes touched water. She couldn't tell how deep. Angels on ground level were scooping the pulped bodies into the water. It must be the duct that

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led the nutrient soup down into the Sound, there to mingle with the big water that no man had ever touched . . . she had been told of the big Sound and the churning waters that seethed and steamed from the pressure of Windbringer's breath, the big Windbringer that is, in whose belly the whole world lay. . . . A sweet smell came from the water, and her ears touched the ear-tickling windshape of its constant running.

Beyond the singing water, a round thing with a stud, set into the wall—a door, shrunk by distance! She didn't know whether it was a *real* door, surely the shrinking of distance could not make something man-high into something the size of child's fist. But perhaps—

Got to keep moving, she signed grimly. Water washed her foot.

I'm going crazy! her Touch-brother signed weakly. *It's all dark to me, there's nothing to recognize, nothing to touch but things that always change—*

Be brave. She dodged an angel. She was getting good at it now, sidestepping it and observing it pummel the stone relentlessly as though it were a corpse.

They were waist high in thick, flesh-sodden water. Touch-brother was still, giving up in confusion, and she was gripping him hard and supporting his dead weight.

Her feet were sinking into slush. There was no way of telling how deep the slush went, and whether there would be room to stand. *We have to push on,* she signed, *through this water. . . .*

On impulse she began to thrash at the water wildly with her arms and legs. The water was buoyant. Perhaps she could float towards the ever-growing circle of door . . . no. A current was pushing her inexorably away from it. She thrashed harder, battling the stinking water, while her Touch-brother clung like a leaden thing. *Only a little way—*

A final shove, and her feet left the bottom and she found herself thrusting towards the metal circle ahead. Then dryness.

They rested awhile. Here the floor was metal. Across the water—Darktouch had never touched so much water before in her life, could not conceive of such a thing, for she had known only jars and pots of the liquid—the angels scurried, mincing bodies and ignoring them.

I think we're safe, she signed.

He didn't answer.

What's wrong, Boy-before-Naming, Touch-brother mine?

And then she realized how important her special gift was to both of them. Things she had taken for granted were dark to him. He

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was moving in utter darkness, with nothing to cling to except his strange Touch-sibling who wasn't quite human. . . .

The angels made no move towards them. This was clearly not somewhere they were trained to scan. Resolutely she turned her back on the cavern of the angels and the dead bodies, and made for the door, scrabbling at the metal stud and—

They were through!

The door clanged! Quickly she had pulled Touch-brother through. A curious, hollow gasping windshape escaped his lips, now and then, and he lay in the stillness. For now it was perfectly still, as though—

Yes. There was no wind here at all. The air was still and lifeless.

I must be dead, Darktouch thought. *This must be a dead land, truly.*

She cast her eyes about her, and they met strangeness. There was a chamber that seemed to have no ending. The floor was featureless metal. It was not designed for humans, obviously—there were none of the crannies and bumps that told your feet where to go. There were no guidewalls to touch, so you could know where you were. A soft undark, warmer than in the cavern of corpses, glowed from the very walls.

She was hungry and had to relieve herself too. And the windlessness was more frightening than anything else she'd ever known.

Why did I do this? she signed in the deathly stillness. *Why?*

And then she remembered how the imagesongs had moved across the big darkness. She remembered how her whole soul had sung with the Windbringer. It all lived still, deep inside her, a slow burning. *I came to find an answer,* she signed to herself.

Eye-images danced inside her: the angels with their pincers outstretched, her father plummeting, fulfilling his pact with the Windbringers, his own life's dream—

Music of undark, warming her, stilling the terror.

The imagesongs haunted her now. Even as the horrors of the flight through the dead land were fading from her memory a little. She stood awhile, waiting. Her eyes became used to the new undark. She could distinguish no distances, for the walls were far and untouchable. There were wild spirals of rock far above and metalfaced machinery that whispered and thrummed in her ears. . . .

But Boy-before-Naming never moved.

Brother, brother. . . .

There was no answer from him at first. Then faintly he scrawled on her arm, *Darkness . . . darkness . . . nothing to touch . . . going . . . crazy . . .* His body began to twitch like a newborn

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baby's. She tried to calm him, touching him all over, covering him with her warm body. He didn't react.

(Of course, she thought. All he can touch is the ground, and that has nothing to remember. It is quite dark, all of it. He is starved for sensations. Slowly, the darkness is driving him mad, and there's nothing I can do!)

Please communicate with me, she signed, *please. . . . Sign anything at all, even a children's fingerchant, just so I know you're alive, if you won't you'll die—*

And then, slowly, he began to drum slowly into her hand, the old fingerchant which all children learnt in the nursery, that taught the basic shapes for the words without the squiggles of tense and case and the curves of emotion, love, hate, anxiety.

Jumper, jumper,
lost his name,
jumper jumping
in the wind

Bringer, Bringer
Run to kiss him
Jumper, nameless,
Bringer, fall,

Stunner, topple,
Scent of Bringer
Jumper jumping
in the wind

Bringer come! Bringer go!
Catch my soul
Fly, jump, fly, jump,
Belly, beast, mother, death,
Warm, soul, fly, go.

Darktouch remembered the words of Stonewise: that this fingerchant had most likely been the gift of the first Windbringer of all, since the shapes had been found, magically chiselled into the walls of the chamber where the knowers knew and the dreamers dreamed their wisdom.

Now she signed, encouragingly, *Good, little brother. Let's do it over and over now so you'll get it right,* and he was scratching all

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higgledy-piggledy like a young child learning to sign, and she chanted it with him, in firm strokes, in the big room built for other than humans—

jumper jumping
in the wind

(and she remembered Father falling, falling into the arms of Windbringer, dying in a blaze of glory. . . .)

Bringer come! Bringer go!
Catch my soul!

(she signed harder, drawing blood, and Touch-brother's touch weakened further on her arm, and Father fell over and over. . . .)

Belly, beast, mother, death,
Warm, soul, fly, go. . . .

(and the undark rippling in the huge darkness, and the tingling windshapes, and the nightmare fading into quiet joy, firetouching the distant water below, and the windghosts blazing. . . .)

The tears were streaming, hot, stinging her parched lips. And now her Touch-brother was still.

Come on! she signed, forcing gaiety from her fingertips. *Come on, kid, Fly, jump, fly, jump. . . .* Then she clasped him, trying to drive all the warmth of her into his body. But he was cold, and growing colder.

(I'm alone, she thought.) She covered her eyes, yearning for ignorance: but even in the self-made darkness the Windbringer's song haunted her memory.

Touch-brother was dead. He could not cope with the sensory vacuum of the enormous chamber, the metal floor, after the nightmare of the flight through the dark country. He had died rather than face the new world.

The angels did not come for him. There seemed to be none here. At least he would not be mangled and turned into soup for the strange moving water, she thought. More in hope than certainty.

Then she turned her back on the body and the door that led back to the country she had known all her life, and began to walk steadily towards the unknown.

Kelver was in trouble, as usual, and for dreaming too much, as usual . . . and so he came to the secret cavern again. He usually came every day now. Sometimes he would just sit there and make the vast chamber into an imaginary helm of a starship of a Lordling's hall of audience. Other times—when he felt braver—he would go to the door into the dark country, and carefully touch the stud (as

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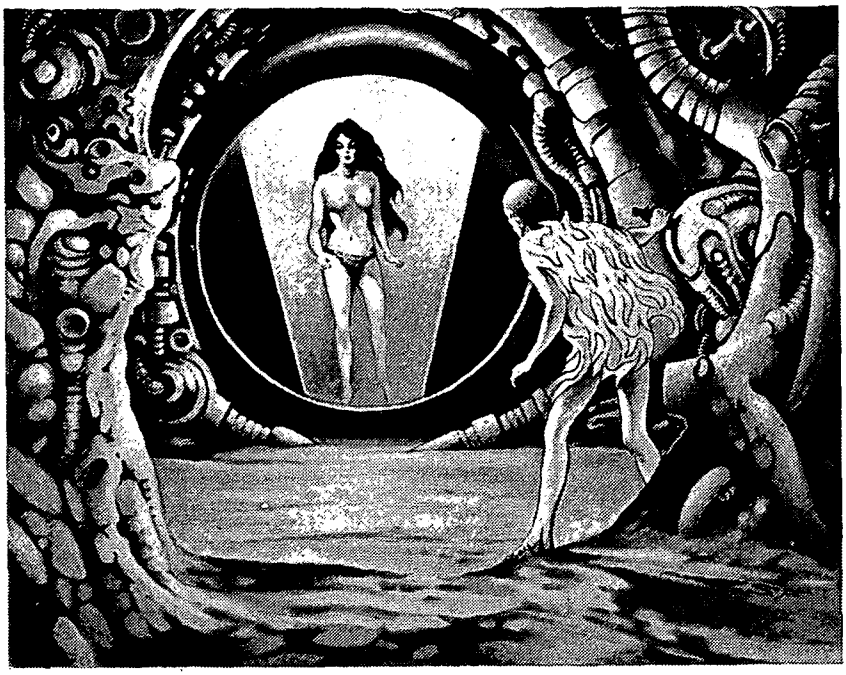

gingerly as though it were a dormant al'ksigark in the desert) and feel the strange-scented wind on him. Sometimes it would bring odors of putrefaction, other times bittersweet fragrances that stirred him and shook him and made him uncomfortable. But he always came back.

And now a girl was walking towards him out of the dark country.

He watched her for a while, stunned and unmoving. The girl did not walk like people. Her head was trained straight ahead as though she were blind, and yet she seemed to be using her eyes. She walked stiffly, her feet reaching, toeing the metal floor very carefully to test for strange objects. She didn't look down. He held his breath, waiting. . . .

She stood still, about twenty meters away from him. She was whiter than the chalksands of Zhnefftikak. As though the suns had never touched her at all. Kelver marvelled at that. She wore nothing but a loinshield of some indeterminate skin, and her hair fell, black as the Skywall mountain, all the way down to her waist. He saw that she was looking at him. He saw her lip quiver a little. He didn't

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know if it was fear or some other emotion. Her face showed nothing at all. It was almost as though she did not know how to show emotion with her face; it was a mask, lineless, perfectly composed.

"Who are you?" he said, wondering.

She showed no reaction. Around them the secret world hummed. Lights twinkleflashing, whorls of metal shimmering. . . . the girl. "Why are you here?" he cried out. And then he felt a strange kinship with her.

Something flashed in her eyes: guilt, laughter, recognition, he couldn't tell. "You've never been in the sun, have you?" he said. "You're from the Dark Country. You've run away . . ." *Like me,* his mind finished. They were both misfits, escapers.

First I saw the tachyon bubbles. Then I found the spoor of the al'ksigark. I'm a finder, aren't I? Now this. This is so much more important! This is something . . . the Inquest has to know.

He thought of the Inquest. Then of his father's corpse, a distant memory, hazy as mist on a chilled crystal goblet, and cold. Then, vividly, his father's smile flashing, then the stone-dead face—*I wish you were here!* his mind cried out. "Can't you talk?"

Suddenly she rushed towards him and—

—seized the strange boy's hand and signed to him, the signs rushing thick and quick from her fingernails, *Oh please please person from the end of the world, I've run away out of the whole world and I've touched the songs of the Windbringers with my eyes and ears and everything has fallen apart, and I need answers, I have to know why they've all lied to us and why they've denied us the power to perceive the Windbringer's songs—*

There was no answer. Instead a stream of windshapes issued from his mouth. They seemed almost purposeful, almost meaningful, very alien compared to the involuntary windshapes of babies or of those in anguish. He didn't even understand her signings!

Give me an answer! she signed with her last strength. *Give me—*

He held the girl to him, even as she was raking contorted scratchings into his arms. He knew somehow that she did not mean to hurt him by it. But exhaustion took her and her finger movements became feeble. He had blood on both arms. He held her tight, soothing her like a wild animal. . . .

"It's all right, there's nothing to fear, nothing to fear. . . ."

He walked her a few steps, toward the entrance of the secret cavern.

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The girl made a strange noise in the back of her throat—

"There's nothing to fear. . . ."

"Fear." It was a distinct word.

"Oh, so you *can* talk," he said. They had reached the entrance and he showed her how to crawl through into the natural part of the cave. She was more at ease as soon as they reached the smaller rooms with their pocked floors. He didn't have to hold her now; she followed him, her hand resting lightly on his back, not looking to right or left. Just like a blind person.

"Don't worry," he said. "Uncle will take care of you; he's a good man, even if he's too tired to really pay me much attention, too wrapped up—"

"Fear." The word re-echoed.

"Don't keep saying . . . oh, it's all you can say, isn't it? Did you just copy that from what I was saying? Don't they speak the Inquestral tongue in your country? Or it's a different dialect I guess, like the ghost people from Zhnefftikak—"

They reached the cave-mouth. It was broad daylight. Kelver stepped out of the cave. Ahead, the Cold River stretched on its pylons, angling down to ground level for about fifty meters and then running on to infinity. Above them the mountain loomed. The suns were one behind the other, unbearably brilliant, and the rocks burned even Kelver's callused feet. The girl stood in the cave-mouth's shadow and for the first time she moved her head from side to side, and fear seemed to fleck her eyes. She darted back into the cavern, he ran in to seize her and bring her out again, and they stood there, him clasping her tightly and the girl shielding her eyes with her hands. Carefully Kelver pried them away, and then pointed ahead to the bright porcelain cubes in the mid-distance that were the village, and she shook her head wildly and then looked out, finally, and then she murmured, "Fear. Fear. Fear. Fear."

And he knew now that she did not know what it meant but had just managed to mimic one of his words; but then he thought of the implications of what had just happened—how he, a mere boy from a back village in a backwater planet in a backward solar system, had stumbled on something that no one in his whole cosmos knew existed, something so important that perhaps even the Inquest itself would be dragged in—when he thought about all this he felt fear too.

"First things first," he whispered. "We'll go back to the village and we'll teach you to talk our language, and find out why you're here . . . then we'll see if we must tell the Inquest. . . ."

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But he already knew that he was at the beginning of a journey to unknown places and among people of power. Kelver was different from the other people of his village, after all. He could see beyond. He could imagine starships streaking through space, in the black emptiness that was Skywall. But seeing did not make him any less afraid.

"Fear! Fear!" the girl cried out.

There was much that Kelver could not yet see. How, half a continent away, the planet's thinkhive was buzzing, activating dormant robot drones from the heart of the Dark Country, breathing life into never-used circuitry, issuing commands to secret machines of death. The girl should already have been dead; but a vast instrument of death that had not wakened in twenty thousand years could not be bestirred in a few seconds. There was still time: how much time, not even the planetary thinkhive knew for certain.

ELEVEN: THE INQUESTORS

Darktouch learnt speech quickly enough. In the village they sometimes called her Girl-who-Burns, because of the way she devoured new knowledge, new sensations.

The name came true when the angels came to find her. They left the village a smouldering ruin. And she and Kelver fled, despairing, into Zhnefftikak. The desert swallowed them.

Their love for each other was all that sustained them. That, and the girl's memories. Shadows of the imagesongs, whose hauntings never left her thoughts. . . .

Finally they rejoined the Cold River. They did not know where it led, exactly, only that it must lead somewhere—perhaps even to the Inquestors themselves. So they threw themselves into it, not knowing whether they would ever wake again. Deathcold, the liquid gases washed over them and kept them, barely alive, entangled atop a delphinoid brain bound for the shipyards of Effelkang. It was a slow journey. Gallendys drifted into its long winter while they slept. The desert turned to glass. In the near-winter the al'ksigarkar spread out their mantles to catch the last of the sunlight and synthesize food stores for their long sleep, and then they froze into crystal gargoyles, glittercold in the winter light. The River flowed on, arrow-straight, spearing the glazed desert. . . .

Then came forcedomes under which lay the cities of the towers built on the towers of towers, where an unnatural summer smiled

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over a few hundred square klomets.

The Cold River disgorged the sleepers and the brain of the Windbringer. It might have been the very Windbringer that had taken Windstriker's life; the time was about right.

Two frozen children, found in the tubes that fed the shipyards, unidentified—

"We don't have time," said Varuneh. "The power satellites have all been moved into place. We can't go on deceiving the Inquest about their true purposes—"

Davaryush looked up from the firefountain. It was in the atrium of the Varuneh estate. His own home, too, now that they had become lovers, during the long months when they had prepared for the destruction of the Skywall mountain. In which he had been drawn deeper and deeper into the dreams of the utopians. . . . It was a distant sort of love they shared, really. Inquestors had all the direct emotion burned out of them, long before they were unleashed on the Dispersal of Man. And Davaryush could never get at what really counted, deep in Varuneh's heart; for she was too old for that, hundreds of years too old.

"It's a wonder, Vara dearest," he said, soothing her. For suddenly he knew that these children must be from the mountain itself. "They must have some mesage for us. They insist on seeing us."

"I don't want you to lose your nerve now, Daavye, when we've so much to lose! If you see them, you may never bring yourself to—"

He kissed her then. They clung together. After all this time, the plan still awed them, so that neither of them could bring himself to utter what they both knew—that far above them, the power satellites wheeled, invisible, waiting to rain down destruction on the thing that held the Galaxy together. "We *must* see everything," he said sternly. "We must face everything. We're *Inquestors.*"

And he led her toward the displacement plate, her hand trembling in his.

The children lay wrapped in the soft floor of a hut in the shipyards, thawing out. An environment shield protected them.

The two Inquestors stepped into the room. An attendant made to dissolve the barrier, but Davaryush waved him away. The children could not see out; the barrier had been opaqued on their side.

"They're so young," Varuneh whispered.

They were fourteen or fifteen, Davaryush saw—hard to tell sometimes, with the shortlived—and they had just awakened and were

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sitting up, speaking intently. There was no fear in their faces. Davaryush saw the boy: nothing remarkable about him. But the girl—what a strange girl she was! She was so pale that it seemed no sun had ever touched her flesh, and her hair was long and black as space itself. Their bodies were streaked with scars, old and new. A single cloak of firefur warmed both of them.

Davaryush saw how much in love they were, in the manner of the young. His immense age weighed down on him. He was humiliated, shamed by them, because he could never know their kind of love, the wild love that would brave such terrible odds to reach this city. . . .

He clapped his hands. The barrier dissolved.

The boy moved to shield the girl, and cried, "Take us to someone in authority! Take us to someone who will give us answers!"

"Why?" Davaryush said. He stood up straight and stern, in an attitude that would have cowed the highest clans of any world.

"No one will help us!" said the girl. She spoke hesitantly, as though not used to speech.

"Where have you come from?" Varuneh asked. Davaryush saw that it was hard for her, too, to restrain her compassion. It was this that made her speak harshly to the children.

"We are from the dark country."

So it was that Davaryush learned of the delphinoids and their songs. It was not the girl's description that moved him . . . for she was barely coherent, and often she would weep or become silent in mid-thought, tightening the tension in the room . . . no. It was the fact that she had encountered something she had not understood, and for that she had risked everything—not just her life, but her culture, her beliefs, her whole world. And the boy, who had not even shared her vision, had come with her out of love alone.

He turned to Varuneh. "We've been wrong, Vara!" he said. "This kind of love has been washed from us, we've been too involved in *makrugh,* in the fates of star systems and of worlds. . . ." He turned his back on all of them. His own bitterness had surprised him. Even now, *makrugh* dictated that he should not let the children see him weep.

He motioned the others out of the room, into the open.

Under the artificial warmth, the familiar scene of ship-building: nutrient sprays, great brain-hulks with hulls half-soldered onto them, bustling of workers and whistle and roar of machinery. . . .

Quietly he said to Varuneh: "This revolution that we've planned—it's wrong. You understand, don't you? We can't destroy

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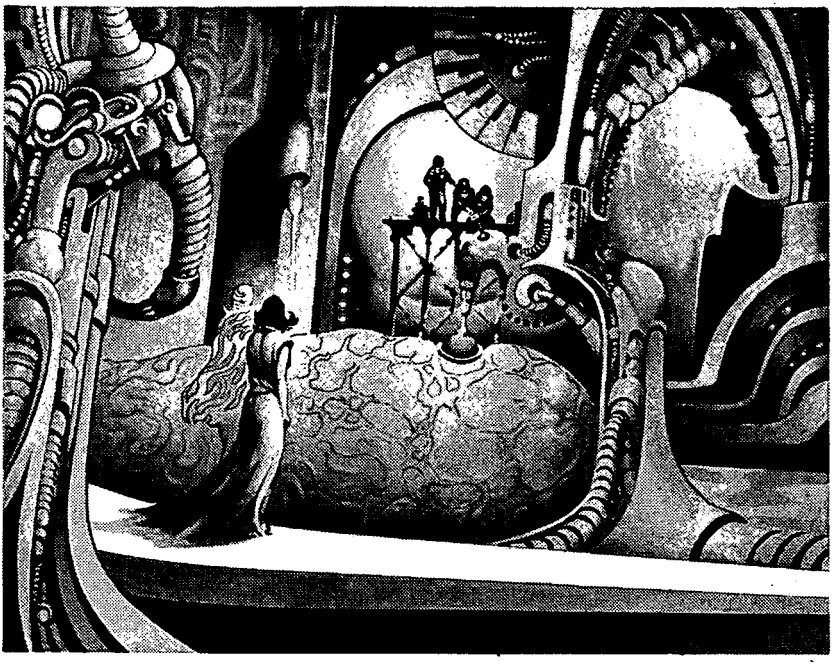

the Inquest and send everything into chaos. We've got to work from within. We've got to begin like these children did . . . with love. Please understand—"

Varuneh made as if to object. But she said nothing. He knew then that she had seen what he had seen.

Then he said to the children, "You are going back to the Dark Country. And so are we. We will all see this truth for ourselves. We will all be changed, and when we have been changed we will change the Dispersal of Man. Do you understand this?" He looked at the children. Their stares did not waver. He saw that the girl, watching the workmen going at the delphinoid brains, was clenching back a terrible, terrible anger.

"I don't know," said the boy earnestly, "what you mean, sir, by all this 'change' and 'truth'. All we want is help. From the highest power. From the Inquestors. Please, sir, lead us to the Inquestors—surely they must know everything! Please!"

"I am the Inquestor," Davaryush said softly. But he knew he had already lost his right to the title.

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Some of you have been asking about the length of stories that we publish—that is, which stories are "short stories," which ones are "novellas," and so on. We haven't been thinking in these categories; instead, we've been classifying the stories by their length in words. For Nebula and Hugo awards, the categories are defined by word count: up to 7,500 words for short stories, from 7,500 to 17,500 for novelettes, from 17,500 to 40,000 for novellas, and over 40,000 for novels. In this magazine, a full page of printed text runs about 450 to 470 words; to determine word-length, then: count pages (allowing for partly-full pages and illustrations) and multiply by 470.

We understand that some of our letterwriters would like us to print their addresses if we print their letters, and some would not. Here's the system we use, then: if you put your complete address at the end of your letter, right under your name there, we'll take this as a signal that it's all right to print your complete address. If you don't put your address at the end *of the letter, then we won't print it, even if you've put your address at the head of your letter.*

Letters are always welcome. Although we don't print many of those that tell us how well (or how poorly) the magazine is being distributed in various cities, this information is very important to us; please keep sending us these reports! Sometimes people ask us where they can find particular science fiction books; we always recommend that these searchers try some of the specialty SF bookstores that advertise in these pages. We have a special section for them, right alongside the book-review section.

Editorial matters should go to the magazine at Box 13116, Philadelphia PA 19101. Subscription matters should go to Box 2650, Greenwich CT 06836. Changes of address—for subscriptions—the Connecticut address. But if you've ever sold us written or artistic material, you should also *send a change of address to the magazine's editorial address. (There could be additional payment coming to you for re-use of your material.) Of course, this applies to* **any** *literary or artistic sale: keep your publishers up to date on your current address.*

Quite separately from Dr. Asimov's contests, we buy poetry on SF and—less often—fantasy subjects. Short poems are particularly useful to us; we are always on the lookout for haiku and limericks. (But before you submit anything *to us for the first time, please* please **please** *send us a stamped, self-addressed envelope about 9 to 10*

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inches long, so that we can send you our sheets on manuscript format and current needs!)

—G.H. Scithers

Dear Mr. Scithers,

James Gunn's article on SF film in your February issue disappointed me. After reading it, I'm not sure what Mr. Gunn was trying to say, but I suspect I disagree with it anyway.

He begins by claiming science fiction seldom makes the successful transition to film. Is his point that SF film is unworthy of serious discussion? It would seem not, for the bulk of the article goes on to do just that. Is he saying SF films are invariably flawed? Perhaps—almost every time he mentions a specific film, it is to list its deficiencies. On the other hand, he fails to mention many of the fine, unflawed films. I can't help thinking he's setting up straw men, for no other reason than they are easy to knock down.

Perhaps the greatest problem was that Gunn tried to cover too much ground in too little space. Let's face it—twelve pages is just not long enough to define SF film, show how it differs from written SF, discuss why it is seldom as good as other kinds of SF, run down the history of SF film, compare SF film to SF radio, talk about television SF, and review several books about SF film. Brevity has its place, but I think any of those subjects deserves individual treatment.

Well, that's what I found wrong with the article in general. Here's some specific problems. Gunn claims that the best SF films are made by people who know SF rather than people who know film-making. Perhaps this is why he did not mention *Forbidden Planet,* directed by Fred Wilcox and considered by many to be the best SF film ever made. Wilcox is better known for handling *Lassie Come Home,* and *Planet* is his only SF film attempt. Obversely, Ray Bradbury worked very closely with the director of *The Illustrated Man,* a film with little to recommend it. Likewise, Samuel Arkov's American International team has yet to do a completely satisfactory SF film, despite the fact Arkov claims to have a strong SF background.

I was also surprised by Gunn's complete omission of "The Outer Limits" during his discussion of television S.F. Every student of visual SF agrees this series provided some of the best moments ever filmed. Certainly Mr. Gunn has heard of the series. Why didn't he mention it?

Of course a real rebuttal to Gunn's article would be at least as

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long as the original and would make singularly uninteresting reading. I'll spare you. Instead, let me leave you with an idea suggested by Sturgeon's Law. In the entire history of film-making, there have probably been around 1000 SF releases (depending on how you include TV, horror, and fantasy). These surely include at least 10 classics and 100 worth viewing, (1% and 10% respectively) as well as 900 clunkers, pot-boilers, and timewasters. On the other hand, in any recent year there have been considerably more than 1000 examples of written SF published (again, depending on how you count short stories, S-&-S, etc.). Can you honestly say there have been 10 classics in any given year? One hundred clearly worth reading? Perhaps, but you get the idea. The problem is not so much there are so few good S.F. movies made, but that all those bad ones come back to haunt you at 3:00 AM.

Donald Saxman
Indianapolis IN

Since I know nothing about the visual media, I'll stay out of this one.
—Isaac Asimov

Dear Mr. Scithers & Dr. Asimov,

I am writing to you regarding several things. First off, I have just finished reading Mr. Gunn's article on SF in movies. I enjoyed the article and would be interested in reading the rest of his book. However, I think that he has missed the point of Kubrick's movie *A Clockwork Orange*. It neither "justifies" nor "glorifies" violence; it is a visually stunning film of black comedy. Except for this single point I agreed with his view of SF films.

Since Mr. Gunn wrote his article, two television movies have been shown that are relevent to his subject. They are public television's version of *The Lathe of Heaven* by Ursula Le Guin and NBC's production of parts of Ray Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles*. *The Lathe of Heaven* is public television's first made-for-TV movie, and they did a very good job of it. It kept the theme of the book intact and was not populated with cardboard characters that acted (seemingly) without motivation. This adaption is a large step in the right direction (if you'll pardon the cliché) for science fiction movies. I urge anyone else who saw the movie and agrees with me to write to their local public broadcasting station and tell them so. This sort of thing should be encouraged.

Contrariwise *The Martian Chronicles* was very disappointing. The sets were bad, the acting worse, and all the magic of Bradbury's

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writing disappeared behind ridiculous aliens and was drowned out by TV-disco background music. *Very* disappointing.

Sometime ago you published an article about science fiction on records. Since reading that article I have been intending to write to you on the subject of musical science fiction.

The selection is not great but there are some songs and albums with SF themes. One of the best is Jeff Wayne's musical version of *The War of the Worlds* by H.G. Wells. I strongly recommend this to contemporary music fans, even non-science-fiction-oriented ones. It takes some liberties with the story, but none are serious, and it is probably the most accurate adaption of any kind (radio, film, or television).

Another accurate retelling is *Journey to the Center of the Earth* by Jules Verne. It was produced by Rick Wakeman and the London Symphony Orchestra.

Some other albums are: *2112* by Rush; *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* (E.A. Poe) by the Alan Parsons Project; *Diamond Dogs* by David Bowie; and the (approximately) 30-minute piece *Karn Evil 9* by Emerson, Lake, and Palmer (from the album *Brain Salad Surgury*).

There are other albums and many individual songs. There is even an album called *I Robot* by Alan Parsons (though the songs are not musical adaptions of the stories). It's an interesting area for those of us who are both science fiction and music fans.

Sincerely,

Andrew Charles
Rt. #3
Ames IA 50010

Thank you for the information on still another dimension of SF.
—Isaac Asimov

Dear Mr. Scithers:

The March issue of your magazine, as usual, brought the rest of my life to a complete standstill. You certainly deserve your Hugo, and if there is intelligent life on Earth, you will continue to get them.

However, I think your reply to Mr. Loranger was the first serious editorial blunder I've seen in your magazine. I was astonished to read your weak apology for the "strong language" in Fred Pohl's story. I read that story, and didn't notice any, so I went back to that

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issue to hunt for some. Sure enough, there were a few words here and there not suitable for Easter Mass at the Vatican, but there was nothing unsuitable for that story.

Fred Pohl's series (sure to be a book) will be remembered as one of the great tales of the SF field, right along with Herbert's *Dune*, Wyndham's *Rebirth*, Miller's *Canticle for Leibowitz*, etc. Doctor Pohl's mail-order D.D. is worth as much as most D.D. degrees, and he has made as good a use of his as most.

Yours truly,

David E. Bushard
River Falls WI

Well, I agree with you; but opinions vary and we must allow for heterogeneity.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Sirs:

I would just like to congratulate you on the fine job you are doing on your magazine. The stories are fascinating, and I especially enjoy the loose, unstuffy image that you project. For this reason, I am very sorry that you feel the need to apologize for printing a fine story as Frederik Pohl's "The Cool War" uncensored. I'll never understand the revulsion many people feel towards these mere words, but I suggest that they can easily stop reading a story when it begins to offend them. This is much more satisfactory than to demand an author change elements in his story that he feels are important to characterization or anything else related to his story. Mr. Pohl is a fine writer, and I'm sure he does not use these words frivolously

Sincerely,

George Steffanos
81 Old Coach Hwy
Hamden CT

Truthfully, George, Shawna, and I are conservative in the matter of language; and you may be sure we don't publish "these words" frivolously.

—Isaac Asimov

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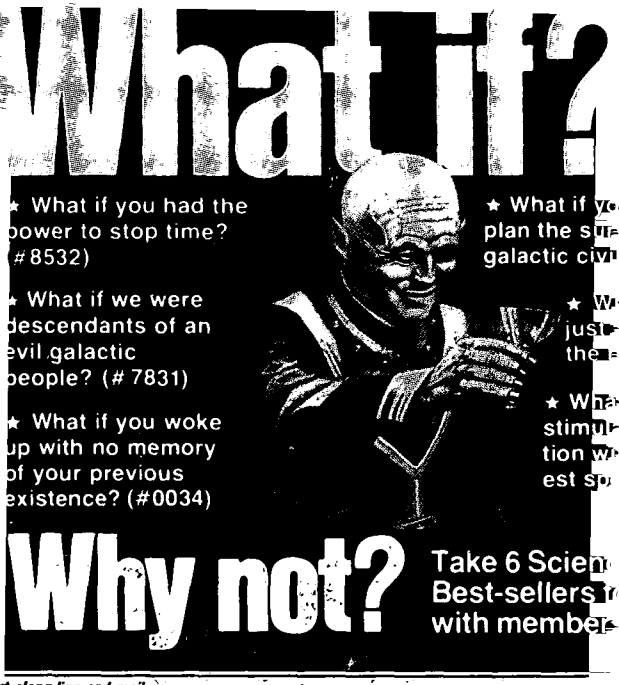
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